

# Karttikeya

## the divine child

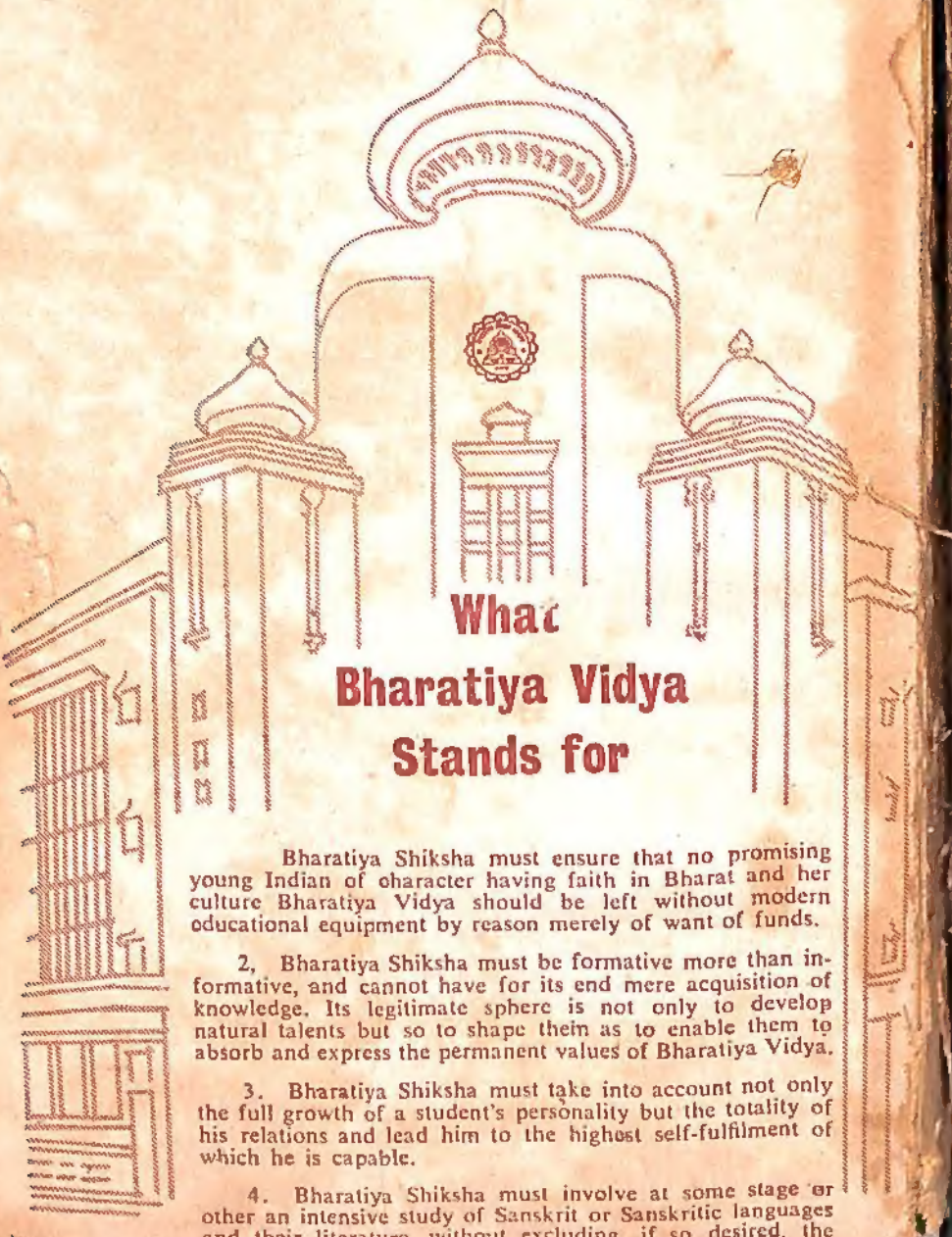
The Hindu testament of wisdom



Rama Navaratnam



BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY-7



## What Bharatiya Vidya Stands for

Bharatiya Shiksha must ensure that no promising young Indian of character having faith in Bharat and her culture Bharatiya Vidya should be left without modern educational equipment by reason merely of want of funds.

2. Bharatiya Shiksha must be formative more than informative, and cannot have for its end mere acquisition of knowledge. Its legitimate sphere is not only to develop natural talents but so to shape them as to enable them to absorb and express the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya.

3. Bharatiya Shiksha must take into account not only the full growth of a student's personality but the totality of his relations and lead him to the highest self-fulfilment of which he is capable.

4. Bharatiya Shiksha must involve at some stage or other an intensive study of Sanskrit or Sanskritic languages and their literature, without excluding, if so desired, the study of other languages and literature, ancient and modern.



5. The re-integration of Bharatiya Vidya, which is the primary object of Bharatiya Shiksha, can only be attained through a study of forces, movements, motives, ideas, forms and art of creative life-energy through which it has expressed itself in different ages as a single continuous process.

6. Bharatiya Shiksha must stimulate the student's power of expression, both written and oral, at every stage in accordance with the highest ideals attained by the great literary masters in the intellectual and moral spheres.

7. The technique of Bharatiya Shiksha must involve—

(a) the adoption by the teacher of the *Guru* attitude which consists in taking a personal interest in the student; inspiring and encouraging him to achieve distinction in his studies; entering into his life with a view to form ideals and remove psychological obstacles; and creating in him a spirit of consecration; and

(b) the adoption by the student of the *Sishya* attitude by the development of—

(i) respect for the teacher,

(ii) a spirit of inquiry,

(iii) a spirit of service towards the teacher, the institution, Bharat and Bharatiya Vidya.

8. The ultimate aim of Bharatiya Shiksha is to teach the younger generation to appreciate and live up to the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya which is flowing from the supreme art of creative life-energy as represented by Shri Ramachandra, Shri Krishna, Vyasa, Buddha and Mahavira have expressed themselves in modern times in the life of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

9. Bharatiya Shiksha while equipping the student with every kind of scientific and technical training must teach the student, not to sacrifice an ancient form or attitude to an unreasoning passion for change; not to retain a form or attitude which in the light of modern times can be replaced by another form of attitude which is a truer and more effective expression of the spirit of Bharatiya Vidya; and to capture the spirit afresh for each generation to present it to the world.





आ नो भद्राः कृतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

*Let noble thoughts come to us from every side*

—Rigveda, 1-89-i

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**KARTTIKEYA**

**THE DIVINE CHILD**

( THE HINDU TESTAMENT OF WISDOM )

By

**RATNA NAVARATNAM**

## **BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY**

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**BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY**

# **KARTTIKEYA**

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**RATNA NAVARATNAM**



1973

**BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN**

**BOMBAY-7**

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## KULAPATI'S PREFACE

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulses of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the re-integration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the framework of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are progressively transnuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.



In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita* by H.V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere". After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

1, Queen Victoria Road,  
New Delhi,  
3rd October, 1951

K. M. MUNSHI

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Illustrations Nos. 1 to 16—**Courtesy:** French Institute of Indology,  
Pondicherry.

Illustrations Nos. 17 to 21—**Courtesy:** Ananda Vikatan, Madras.

## INTRODUCTION

The Hindu Testament of Wisdom as enshrined in the cult of Muruga is unfolded in this book. Who is the Divine Child? Who is Kumara-Muruga?

From the effulgent eye of Siva was begotten Kumara-Muruga, the eternal child of Light, the incarnate wisdom of the ages. Muruga is the embodiment of everlasting fragrance of life, the symphony of Beauty, Truth and Love.

Muruga, the Divine Child, is depicted in this Testament of Wisdom as a *Power*, seen and unseen, known and unknown, in whom are amalgamated many legends and traditions, many aspects of religion and modes of worship, primitive and advanced. He embodies the Hindu ideal of God immanent in all things and manifesting Himself in diverse forms—as the Divine Guru, God of sacrifice, leader of the powers of righteousness, devas, seers and sages, God of war and peace, the source of wisdom and grace, and above all, the magnetic lover, the child of Love and Light.

We analyse the different aspects of His penetrating Light, on many aspects of spirituality in different



traditions and seek to find unity in diversity, transcendent wisdom enshrined in tradition, fulfilment in the victory of the power of righteousness over the forces of evil, and unfoldment of the spiritual treasury of realisation through the pathways of Bhakti (devotion), Karma (action) and Jnana (wisdom). Such is the purport of this book, which follows the earlier book on *Tiruvachakam: The Hindu Testament of Love*, published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in 1963.

It is an accepted fact that there is a power behind all the manifested forms of this universe. There should be a Power to dispense the fruits of our actions. Attuning our mind to that Power (God-head) with love is called Bhakti or devotion.

This book penetrates the veils of Time and Eternity, the Vedas, Agamas, Puranas, the Epics and the classical poetry of the Academy of Letters (Sangam Epochs) of the Tamil Nad. It delves into the traditional modes of belief and worship of Kumara-Muruga, in an humble effort to reveal the grandeur that illumines the cult of Muruga, down the ages to the ever-present Now—in principio.

The first part of the book deals with the vision of Muruga as delineated by Saint Nakkirar in his immortal poem *Tirumurugarrupadai*. This illustrious poet lived in Madurai, the capital of the kingdom of Pandiyans, in the golden age of the Tamil Academy of Letters, at the beginning of the first century A.D.<sup>1</sup>

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1. The Light of Truth or Siddhanta Dipika, 1912, page 407,

The poem depicts in every detail the concept of Muruga as glorified in the tradition of Tamilakam. A study of this poem leads us to consider the social and literary background of the culture of the Tamils, their intrinsic forms of worship of Kumara-Muruga, hailed by the indigenous race of the South as the favoured deity of the mountainous terrain called Kurinchi by Tolkappiar. He is also the eternal beloved of Valli and Devayanai, the Divine Teacher, (Swaminatha) as revealed in the anthologies of poems constituting the Sangam Classics. Many a siddha in the Tamil Nad has invoked Him as *Guru Guha*—the divine teacher who dwells in the cave of the heart.

An English translation of the poem of Saint Nakkirar, a renowned poet of the Third Sangam era, entitled *Tirumurugarrupadai* is the pivot on which this study of the development of Muruga worship has been worked out. This poem of three hundred and seventeen lines of sublime poetry written in classical Tamil adopts the dialogic form of poetic technique known as *Aarruppadai* which is unique to Tamil poesy. Herein a mature guide who has relished the bliss of the grace of a benefactor—in this instance it is Muruga—leads a novice who desires to tread the same way, to gain the award of His Grace. The very technique itself betokens the spirit of benevolence of the rulers and the loyalty of the subjects of this golden age.

The poet penetrates in a novel manner the citadels, well established and illustrious as Tirupparankunram and Tirucheeralavai, of the worship of Muruga. His abodes or *Padaividu* have been extolled by Saint Nakkirar and all other successive

poets on Muruga, as magnetic sanctuaries where He dwells, drawing people by the spell of love. We have tried to retain the lyrical quality of these cantos with their high metaphysical import in our translation, as well as examined the greatness of the subject—Kumara, the Divine Child of Light, and the grandeur of human aspiration and love that seek to attain His Grace, in a magnificent pilgrimage of the soul.

In this Idyll, the author conveys in exquisite lines of poesy, the fascinating abodes of Muruga, with their enthralling natural setting and picturesque craftsmanship. The life of the people, their pursuits and pastimes, their piety and incantation are all brought out in an exuberance of imagery and diction. They are paeans of praise by man and nature; the heroic exploits of Muruga, His majestic form of six faces with twelve arms, mighty in stature, the splendour of his valour and the enchantment of His love, are all reflected in inimitable poesy with a crescendo of faith and devotion, that crowns *Tirumurugarrupadai* as a poem par excellence, in the religious poetry of the world, not second to Dante's Divine Comedy, or the Canticles of St. John of the Cross.

The quintessence of this poem of poems is the grand vision of Muruga to His devotees who had sought Him in the sanctified sanctuaries of love—His six abodes—as the goal of their lives. The Testament of Wisdom proclaimed in *Tirumurugarrupadai* is the assurance of 'Fear Not', and the certitude of realisation. The author has effected a subtle ming-



ling of the traditional Vedic form of worship with that of the indigenous, spontaneous form of worship; a fusion of the light and dark cameos in the terrestrial and celestial spheres, an affirmation of doctrinal and ritual approaches, as well as a rejection of sceptred might and cloistered authority. In his poem, Nakkirar himself walks on the bridge of love and harmony, and paves the way for an integral understanding among all levels of Muruga worshippers. His is a revelation of an indissoluble relationship between cause and effect, and thereby he establishes that the love of the power and origin of all that are beloved of us, is sustained. Herein lies the greatness of this immortal poem.

The conception of Kumara-Muruga as revealed in the literature and language of the Tamils has been traced faithfully, following the extant works of *Tolkappiam* and *Paripadal*. In the southern tradition of the Hindus, Muruga connotes everlasting fragrance, youth, divinity and beauty. In the collections of *Ettutogai* and *Pattuppāttu* of the Tamil Sangam Literature, are many lyrics devoted to this eternal lover who fills the seeker with rapturous bliss, and they fill us to this day with something of their ethereal piety.

In *Paripadal*, *Ahananuru*, *Purananuru*, and the *Kurunchi* anthologies, Muruga's birth, exploits, acts of grace and love are delineated with an irrepressible charm and beauty that leave no doubt in our minds that the cult of Muruga was deep-rooted in the religious life of the Tamils in the heyday of their civilisation, some three thousand years ago. In these

works and especially in *Paripadal*, we get the concept of Muruga, the flaming God—*Cevvël*—as the supreme source of energy, and we get the panoramic vision of the universal Muruga in the natural setting of hilltops and mountains, rivers and sea coasts. The primal deity of the Kurinchi land was Muruga, and his lance and cock banner were extolled by the worshippers.

*Paripadal*, a notable collection of poems of great merit of the third Sangam epoch, has been translated and marked for special study, as it furnishes valuable data about the legends and worship of this deity in the ancient Tamil territory. Almost all the myths relating to the birth and exploits of Muruga known in the Puranic period are portrayed in the eight poems on Muruga in *Paripadal*. *Cevvël*, as he is termed in these poems, is compared to lustrous fire. In another poem occurs these memorable lines, which reveal the ultimate aim of Muruga worship:

“We implore thee not for boons of enjoyment or  
wealth,  
But for thy grace beatific, love and virtuous  
deeds.’

*Paripadal-5*

The references to the stately temples of Tirup-parankunram, with its art galleries and assemblies of scholars, throw light on the high watermark of Tamil culture, as well as on the popularity and universality of the worship of Muruga. Our translation of *Paripadal* seeks to convey the peculiar cadence of

this type of musical composition. A blend of concepts of Gods like Māyon (Vishnu) and Cēyon (Muruga), and a fusion of religious cults and worship are revealed in these poems, and this prevalence of harmony and tolerance continues to this day to be a noteworthy feature among the devotees of Muruga.

We next examine the evolution of the concept of Subrahmanya-Kumara as revealed in the Vedas and Upanishads, the Epics and Puranas. In the vedic lore, Muruga is termed *Subrahmanya*. *Su* means joy, auspiciousness; *Brahma* means the Supreme Reality; *nya* denotes whatever derives its origin in the Supreme Reality. Thus *Subrahmanya* means the *One* who took His origin from the Supreme Reality which is joy, and who is inseparable from that Reality. He is the great upholder of the Vedic way. The Sadakshara mantra, '*Saravana bhava*', is sacred to Skanda and has a mystical import. As son of Siva, He is in no way different from Siva. He is a reflex of Siva. Kumara is blended of aspects of Rig-Vedic Soma, Agni, Indra, Varuna, Brihaspati and Hiranyagarbha.

Kumara is a Rig Vedic divinity affirming the immensity and the variety of Reality. The Puranas give biographical details and Skanda is extolled as Deva Senapati. In the Chandogya Upanishad (7) Skanda is referred to as the Supreme Being. Sanat Kumar taught sage Narada how to overcome ignorance and attain wisdom. "The way that leads to light or wisdom points to Skanda". Sanat Kumar, the child eternal, who taught the Brahma Vidya is

declared to be none else than Skanda, by reputed Sanskrit scholars.

We proceed to a study of the Epics and Puranas and other sources which depict Muruga as a great integrator among the divinities. Muruga is acclaimed as the son of Siva and Sakti, the beloved nephew of Vishnu, brother of Ganesa and son-in-law of Indra. He is hailed as the God of valour, the wielder of the victorious lance Vel, and the saviour of the lowly. Thus Muruga and Subrahmanya are terms signifying the love for this God, of two streams of culture. The blend of the two streams of grace as embodied in Siva and Sakti are united in Kumara-Muruga. By invoking His grace and chanting His magic formula, we invoke the grace of Siva and the divine Mother and attain enlightenment.

The advent of Kumara has been celebrated by poet Kalidasa in *Kumara Sambhava*; and Panini's *Vyakarana Sutra* and *Sri Tattva Nidhi* speak of his forms as Gangeya, Guha, Shanmukha, Visakha and Karttikeya. The *Saiva Agamas* and *Kumara Tantra* deal mainly with the ceremonial worship of Muruga and the conduct of the formal rites, the construction of images and icons with the rules governing the installation of Muruga in the temples as principal or associate deity.

The Tirumurais of the Saiva saints ranging from the seventh century to the twelfth century A.D. contain many allusions to Muruga as the dynamic son of Siva. The triune aspects of Siva, Uma and Skanda form the concept of *Somaskanda*, the



most popular form of Siva worship from the Pallava period, in all South Indian temples. Saint Tirugnanasambandar whose moving psalms heralded the awakening of the Saiva faith in South India in the seventh century is acclaimed as the manifestation of Muruga.

*Kandapurānam* of Kachiappa Sivachariar is a prolific work in Tamil, which elaborates Kandan's divine wisdom, which is at once the essence of divine grace. It is a wondrous testimony of the power of Siva's Will on earth, even as His Will prevails in the kingdom of the Devas and Gods. The perennial charm of *Kandapurānam* lies in its entrancing stories on the manifestations of the Divine Child—Kandan—and his myriad activities to save men and devas from the bondage of their three-fold limitations of *Karma*, *Maya* and *Anavam*. It was found necessary to expound on the esoteric meaning of this most widely known work on Muruga in a brief manner, in order to substantiate the validity of tradition and its continuity in a progressive evolution of Muruga as a source of power (*kriya*), love (*iccha*), and wisdom (*jnana*) in South India, Ceylon and Far East Asia.

We next proceed to reflect on the experiential bliss of the devotees of Muruga and begin with the famous poem of *Sri Subrahmanya Bhujangam* by Adi Sri Sankaracharya, as an appealing canticle on Muruga—the Light of Wisdom. Before his beauteous form at Tiruchendur, Sri Sankara, the advaitic seer, melts into poetic delight in contemplation of that Form of the Formless One. The goal of *Skanda Sayujyam*

(union with Muruga) is the fitting reward of a pious study of this poem, which has been translated by us in lucid prose without sacrificing the melody of the poet's supplication and adoration.

"Will Thou not quell this foe of mine,

This my ignorance that afflicts me sorely"? V. 23.

When ignorance flees, Sankara testifies that the luminous wisdom shall illumine the inmost recess of his heart, and the poem lifts us to the summit of Skanda Sayujyam.

"Grant that my body and mind

Be immersed in thy light." V. 26.

We have compiled a selection of canticles, mantra slokas, invocatory chants, and holy psalms of St. Arunagirinathar which we believe can help to fructify true devotion and enable a *bhakta* (a man of devotion) to become a *jnani* (a man of knowledge), one who sees Muruga everywhere and in everything. The quest of Muruga leads a *bhakta* to the quest of his own real self, till finally it leads him to the conquest of duality, when he surrenders himself to the *Guha*, who abides for ever in the cave of his heart. Thus the invocatory chant and Dhyāna Mantra and the singing of inspiring hymns on Muruga help in attaining *sānti* or peace.

A study of Muruga worship will be incomplete without a dip into the mystery of Kathirgānam. This is significant as proving the import of the form-

less state of worship of Muruga prevailing to this day at Kathirgāmam. Here the effulgent glory of the divine child of wisdom in the veiled silence of the sanctum sanctorum is affirmed by the tuneful devotion of millions of devotees of all creeds and climes.

*Idam Sarvam* is His abode. The light of Kathirāmalai beckons one and all to come unto Him—all who are heavily laden with the ceaseless combat of pain and evil—to follow the way of devotion. In the beginning, the piety of the devas, their penance and prayers, fasts and vigils, their sacrifices and worship helped them to win Muruga's grace. His *Pāsarai* (encampment) that was Kathirgāmam was the scene of his victory over the Asuras. Today it stands as a symbol of Muruga's power, the testimony of the ages. His living presence can be felt and experienced today in an equally efficacious manner as in the ages past. Once the river Manicka Ganga is crossed, the thronging pilgrims are carried in the stream of love, only to get engulfed in the serene embrace of the beloved of Valli-Muruga.

This oneness with Truth is the mystery of Kathirgāmam. *Kathir* is jyothi or effulgence, and in Kathirgāmam, He abides in Light and illumines with wisdom all who seek him there, in contemplation and ecstatic devotion. The attributeless, formless worship of Muruga witnessed today in the sanctum of Kathirgāmam has its roots in the intrinsic tradition set out in *Tholkappiam* in the *Puraṇinai Sutra*. Naṇchinarkīniar interprets *Koḍinilai* as sun

and *Valli* as moon and *Kantali* as that which is attributeless and formless.

Kathirgāmam delineates Muruga in his formless state and his worship in the *Kantali* aspect. Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, learned and untutored—all flock to this sylvan shrine and commingle in a worship of devotion and love. *Thy silence is the way* is what is betokened in the chapter on *Kathirgāma Rahasya*. The universality of worship at Kathirgāmam, a reminder of the ancient form of Hindu mystic worship of the supreme God-head, is what gives it an intrinsic value and appeal today. It is a significant testimony of the eternal wisdom that is for ever associated with the luminous Vēl implanted on the summit of Kathiramalai. The flame of the Divine Child is enshrined in the heart of love, and He reveals Himself to those who seek Him in devotion.

Select translations of the poems on Muruga sung by different authors at different periods of time before dedicated abodes and temples convey to us the intensity of their fervent love for the Divine Child. In purity, detachment, and selfless service, we witness man becoming a participant of the treasury of wisdom, that is the repository of the God-head. The illumined St. Arunagirinathar, St. Kumaraguruparar, Ramalinga Swamigal, and Pamban Adigal sang His praises as an aid to God-realisation, till they were merged in His supreme effulgence. Not forgetting the masses, they awakened from their contemplation, and showed the way to the people, and intensified their faith by their melting songs and *stotras*. Thus the



worship of Muruga was revitalised in every age, by the testament of his devotees.

The divine Kumara-Muruga who is popularly represented with six faces and twelve arms, each face with its corresponding hands being assigned distinctly correlated functions in the cosmic evolution, is perhaps the grandest conception of divine manifestation in the Hindu pantheon. This book seeks to convey the testament of the Power and Wisdom of God as witnessed in the divine activities of Kumara-Muruga, and proclaimed by the sages and saints, down the ages. It is a testament of the Jnana (Gnosis) of God. It is also a testament of the Grace of God in the form of the Son Kumara, as revealed in the Vedas, Agamas, Epics, Puranas and in the popular songs of the Realised Seers.

“In the gloom of fear, His six-fold face doth gleam,  
In perils unbound, His lance betokens ‘Fear Not’,  
In the heart of those who recount His Name  
He doth reveal His gracious Feet.  
Thus He appears to those who chant  
The Hallowed Name of ‘Muruga’.

*St. Nakkirar.*

The Effulgence (Jnana) of *Siva-Sakti* gleams in and through the radiant Son, *Kumara, Muruga, Subrahmanya*, called thus by several endearing terms. He is enthroned in the heart of *Valli-Nayaki*; she is none other than the *Jivatma*—the human soul.



## KUMARA-MURUGA—THE DIVINE CHILD

It is the vision, seen and unseen—the sacramental child becomes the sanctified word.

In Him is the Eye of Wisdom—that luminous Eye on the forehead of Siva—effulgent, radiant, as if a thousand suns are blazing forth. The rays divine herald the dawn.

'Tis the dawn of light from darkness. 'Tis the dawn of life from death, actuality from potentiality. 'Tis the supreme Brahman, 'I Am' from non-consciousness; God from Godhead.

This lustrous Eye is the first formal assumption of Godhead as "Being"—God as *Siva*.

An eternal Will pulsates in the nothing, to transmute the nothing into something, that the Will might feel, find and behold itself.

*Sivam and Sakti become ONE*

The Father is the manifestation of the Godhead—*Para-Sivam*. One and one uniting, there is the Supreme Being—the unity of God without a second.

*Para-Sivam* representing Godhead effects nothing by Himself, and *Sakti*, Mother of all things is the active power, engendering, preserving and resolving in His Light.

In Him, the Tri-Unity meet,—Brahma, the creator, Vishnu the protector, and Rudra who controls the dissolution of the universe. This is the divine comedy and the Divine Child is the witness and the actor.

The Will of Siva is the moving power in all procession. '*Ichha*' (*kama*) or zest is the will to life. It is by His Will that His intrinsic Form (*svarupa*) reveals His intrinsic Nature (*svabhava*).

Therefore the single Will of Siva may be regarded with respect to Essence as the *Being*, and with respect to Nature as *Ichha* or *kama*, zest, craving or desire. The Siva-Sakti aspects of the Will are seen in the Indian legends on the birth of Kumara-Muruga.

The Will proceeds as divine sparks of brilliance from out of the effulgent Eye. The mutual outpouring of love is the common spiration of the Father and the Son. Kumara enjoys himself in all things. The connascence of Father, essence and the Mother nature, the two forms of Para-Brahman, is not a generation from conjoint principles. The son is unborn and unbegotten. So it was, so it is and shall be for ever.

In the beginning, this world was without form and void—*Moolaprakriti*. Godhead is rid of light and darkness, poised in itself in sable stillness. This still-



ness is the incomprehensible nature of God. *Para-Sivam* has all things in potential existence. First to arise in it is the glorious splendour of the light that illumines all things at once. As He shone were the waters born.

*Vāc*, the means of utterance, is synonymous with *Sakti* or omnipotentia. *Vāc* is divine wisdom. She is the mother of all first principles, affirming that she was with God in the beginning. She was the thought of Him who set the universe in motion. *Vāyu* or motion, *Agni* and *Earth* are denotations of the principle of manifestation.

The fiery energy and *rasa* (meaning elixir) from the luminous eye of *Siva* sent forth lustrous sparks and *agni* (fire) with the help of *vāyu* carried them to the bosom of the waters. *Skanda* or *Kumara* makes his appearance in six aspects upon a lotus and is established in the *Saravanai* lake, in the possibility of existence. The six sparks reposed in germinal (*garbha*) state on the *Saravanai* pool. The 'Pleiades', the six stars, popularly known as the *Karttikai* maids or the heavenly wives of the six immortal *Rishis* nurtured the six babes. The Will of *Siva*, *Chit-Sakti*, brings them together in one manifested form, and thus emerged 'Kandan' with six heads and twelve hands, the Divine Child, the saviour of the fearful mortals and the celestials.

The effulgent *Kumara* is perpetually brought to birth in the sacrificial fire at the dawn of every day, as also at the beginning of every temporal cycle. The supernal sun, the fire and the motion are the funda-

mental aspects of the imperishable Word—*Om*. The light (*Aditya*—Sun) in Heaven, of motion (*Vāyu*) in any firmament and the earth as the principle of fire (*Agni*), known in puranic tradition as Lord Vishnu, Brahma and Rudra, are the embodiments of the transcendental *Brahman* or *Para-Sivam* (God-head). The sun is the source of life and *vāyu* is the breath of life. The gift of life radiates from eternity to eternity and no manifestation is conceivable except in terms of pairs of opposites. Neither good nor evil can have any place in *pure being*.

The birth of Kumara or Muruga is a symbolic presentation of the operation of power or energy. Symbolism is the language of the metaphysics. The symbol presupposes that the chosen expression is the best possible description or formula of a relatively unknown fact. The everlasting Godhead is unknown, never was known and never will be known. The supernal image of the son *Kumara* is revealed in the traditional symbolism of the birth of Kumara, and most of the idiom is the common property and inheritance of the Hindus.

The Hindu tradition maintains that the only begotten son is cosmic. The father is the *Sat* (Being). The mother is the *Chit* (wisdom or *vāc*). Wisdom is the divine nature. The unity of essence and nature brings forth *Skanda* or *Kumara*. This going out of the fiery energy is the first sacrifice. The concept of self-sacrifice suffered to the end, so that life may be made more abundant recurs in the Vedas. Many are the sacrifices thus outspread before the face of God, but mostly all of them are by way of works which

lead to release. Better than the sacrifice of any objects is that of wisdom, by which is effected the return of the several powers or elements of consciousness to their single source in the knowing Self. This is the secret gnosis of the Pranavam—OM.

In the beginning was the *Word*—Vāc or Chit; the Word was with Siva or Sat—Being, and the Word was Sivam. In the beginning does not mean at a given time, but in the ever present Now—in principio.

## TIRUMURUGARRUPADAI—A STUDY

### *Introduction:*

Three thousand years ago, in the territories of India where the Tamils held sway, two thousand years ago in the Kingdoms of the Chera, Chola and Pandyan Kings of South India, and down the ages to today, the worship of Muruga has continued to find an honoured place in the annals of the Tamils.

There is ample evidence in the literature and archaeological findings of South India and Sri Lanka to prove the antiquity of the Muruga cult; and even to-day, one often hears from all quarters, the supplication to Lord Muruga. His name is on the lips of those who suffer and those who enjoy, those engaged in war or peace. The old man full of reminiscential glow, the young woman nestling her babe in her arms, the youth at the threshold of life's adventures, the growing child playing on the sands of time—all chant the holy name of Muruga and invoke his protection in the manifold drama of life.

This age of Kaliyuga is believed to be an era of eventful change, when the 'ego' of man exerts its



maximum potency, and destructive forces gain supremacy over the powers of truth and goodness. The Deity of this Kaliyuga is God Muruga—Kaliyuga Varadan—whose weapon the Lance, symbol of victory, pierces the fearful gloom that envelops humanity. The holy name of Muruga fans the flame of spiritual love in the hearts of men and women, the victorious and the vanquished, and renews man's faith in the sanctity of existence on earth and in the strength of the forces of good represented by the Devas. Cevvël or Seyôn as he was known to the ancient Tamils, and remembered today as Muruga and Kandasamy reveals his living Reality in the hearts of his devotees, who testify by their fervent sadhana, the depth of their piety to this God of love and valour. They hail Him as the manifestation of the Supreme Siva. Muruga's mission was to save the Devas from the terror of the Asuras, and point the way of everlasting joy to His devotees on earth.

### *The Author of the Poem:*

Every lover of Muruga chants the idyll of *Tirumurugarrupadai*, sung by *Nakkira Deva Nayanar*, the Poet Laureate of the Third Academy of Tamil Letters, which scholars attribute as having flourished from the third Century B.C. to the second Century A.D. It is a timeless piece of artistic creation, a work of exquisite literary art and apart from its religious value stands out in the literature of the world as a masterpiece of flawless poetry. Nakkirar may be called in the ancient grammarian, Tolkappiar's phrase, *Nirai-Mozhi Māntar*, men who attain mystic powers of utterance by their penance. *Tirumurugarrupadai* is a

revealing text about the popular religion of the Tamils in the classical age. It is one of the earliest and most devotional of the poems on God Muruga—hailed as the Supreme Guardian Deity of the Dravida people, acclaimed also as the Son of Siva, the immanent word that manifested as Being. In one of his less known poems called *Kailaipāti Kāllatipati Antādi*, Nakkirar sang thus:

“The word and its import, the body and the soul,  
Fragrance and flower, flawless like these,  
Our Lord of Kailas Hills too difficult to reach,  
Stands He immanent in all.”

Nakkirar was the son of a reputed teacher at Madurai, called Kanakāyanar and was a distinguished poet of the Third Academy which had its seat in the capital city of Madura, Ptolemy's “royal Modura Pondion”. He was a contemporary of the Pandyan King, Mudattitumaran of the Third Academy of Tamil Letters. His age is believed to be between the first and second Century A.D. He wrote a learned commentary on the well known work entitled *Irayanār Ahaporul*. Vankya Sūdamani Pāndyan offered a handsome donation of gold to the poet who would compose the best poem according to the highest standards of literary composition prevailing at that time. Dharmi, a lowly poet, invoked divine aid and submitted his poem which was selected for the award. However, Nakkirar found fault with a particular line in that poem and tradition avows that even when Siva appeared and supported the correctness of Dharmi's thought and diction Nakkirar persistently refuted it. He suffered the consequence of his arrogance and got

rid of his incurable ailment after undertaking a pilgrimage to Mount Kailas.

It was on his way to Kailas that he encountered the demon Ayakrivan and was captured by him and put in a cave along with 999 men of piety who had been made captives by this *Bhutam*, who wanted to perform a unique sacrifice of one thousand men, in order to fulfil his penance. When Nakkīrar arrived in the cave, his fellow captives were seized with grief as his capture spelt doom for all of them. Tradition declared that Nakkīrar composed this illustrious poem on Muruga during this crisis, and invoked the Lord to guide him and also save his fellow captives from the impending danger. The place of captivity was a mountainous cave on the top of *Tirupparankunram*, and Nakkīrar in the opening lines of the poem *Tirumurugarrupadai* extols its praise, as the holy abode of Muruga. When the poet finished his poem of praise, Lord Muruga appeared and killed the demon with his powerful Lance and rescued the thousand men:

“Kunram erinthāy! Kuraikadalit Sūrthadinthāy!  
Pūnthalaya Pūthap Porupadaiyāy!—Enrum  
Elaiyāy- Alagiāy! Erūrnthān Erēy!  
Uḷaiyāy en ullathu uray.

Kunram Erinthathuvum Kunrapōr Seythathuvum  
Antrangu Amararidar Thirthathuvum—Intrenaik  
Kaividā nintrathuvum Katpothumpit  
Kāthathuvum  
Meyvidā Vīrankai Vēl.

He was also the author of Tiruvingoimālai Elupathu, Tiruvālanjuli Mummanikovai, Peruntēvap Parani, Tiruvelu-Kūtirukkai, Pōtri Kalivenba, Tirukannappa-dēvar Tirumaram and Nāladi Nāropaṭu. His poems are included in the earliest anthologies of Tamil Poetry known as *Naṟṟinai*, *Kuṟṟuntokai*, *Ahanānūru* and *Puraṇānūru*. His son Kiravi Koṟṟanār composed the famous poem on nature called "*Nedunalvāḍai*", which is also included in the above anthology of the Third Academy of Letters, which marked the glorious epoch of the Tamil civilisation.

### *The tradition:*

*Tirumurugārrupadai* is the masterpiece of Nakkirar. It is the first Idyll in the Pattuppāṭtu consisting of ten Idylls which enjoyed popular esteem as marking the high watermark of Tamil poetry in the Third Academy of Letters. Besides this, *Tirumurugārrupadai* is unique in that it is also included in the collection of the sacred Saiva religious poetry known as the eleventh *Tirumurai*. In this text, the author is exalted as *Nakkīra Deva Nayanar*, Saint Nakkirar.

The purport of the author is brought out in one of the closing stanzas of the poem itself:

'In the face of fear, His face of comfort shows!  
In the fierce battle-field, 'fear not', His Lance  
shows!

Think of Him once, twice He shows!  
To those who chant His Name Muruga!

T. M. G. Venba 6.

This poem enjoys great popularity as a timeless work of art, and essentially it is the work of a religious mind, who drew his inspiration from the distinct religious tradition of his land and age. It is believed to be efficacious in that it acts as a healing balm on those who recite it, and even today, we find this poem sung with piety by many a devotee of Muruga.

What is the religious tradition, the peculiar religious import of this great masterpiece on Muruga? Its religious background has to be understood fully before we can enjoy its perennial beauty as a world's great poem. A study of the cultural, historical and literary background of the ancient Tamils will throw light on its exquisite poetic workmanship and the excellence of thought and content. It will also unfold in stages, the inherent religious faith and tradition of the people, who look upon Muruga as their favoured Deity; their covenant with Muruga, through one of their illustrious poets Nakkīrar in the Golden Age of Tamil Poetry, has been enshrined in this immortal poem known as *Tirumurugarrupadai*.

The Academy of Letters (Sangam Epoch) indicates the existence of a highly cultured community and it is on record that the body of Tamil scholars known as the first Sangam, second Sangam and third Sangam epochs extended their influence over a period of centuries before the dawn of the Christian era—periods of great output alternating with comparative barrenness. This Academy of Letters was composed of scholars, poets, critics and writers of great renown, whose imprimatur was necessary for the publication of any work of encyclopaedic range in Tamil. A stan-



dard of excellence was set up, which had the insignia, the hall-mark of approval of the Sangam Laureate poets and authors. The later commentators and critics of these works, which were classified as the Sangam Works, have conformed to the critical standards established in the code of poesy and grammar embodied in *Tolkappiam*, an extant work in Tamil attributed to the Second Academy of Letters, and dated prior to the fifth century B.C.

### *Āruppadai:*

In this background of Tamil Culture, a study of *Tirumurugarrupadai* offers great challenges. The poem has a peculiar technique which is unique to Tamil poesy. A bard or a seer, a poet of exceptional merit, who has enjoyed the benefaction of a king, a warrior hero, or a poet, and in rare instances the grace of a deity, in short one who has enjoyed the boon of an exalted One, meets another companion who is seeking out for similar favours. Out of the abundance of his munificence, the favoured bard recounts his experiences and extols the praise of his master and delineates his attributes and deeds with such delicate subtleties and poetic appeal; he thus points to a novice, the Way that shall ensure success in the attainment of winning the award. Herein is brought out a fundamental concept of the *Guru*, the guide and master in Tamil tradition, who is ever prepared to show the Way he has trod, experienced and found beneficial, to other seekers who stumble in dubious highways and byways of life.

The illumined poet called as the Seer in the East, Nakkīrar in this instance, beckons to one and all who

waver on the crossroads of life, burdened with the penury of the mind, heart and body, the sick and the ailing, the aged and the feeble, the weak and the lost to follow the *path*, that shall take away from them their burdens of suffering and misery and lead them to the goal of Muruga, the great benefactor, who shall reward them for their steadfast devotion and sacrifice. "The Way shall not be long and arduous, if ye but sing His praise and extol Him in the most sublime poesy". Such is the exhortation of Nakkirar, the master guide, and this kind of poetry came to be known as *Arruppadaï* from the age of the Tamil Academy of Letters. In *Tolkappiam*, we get the definition of *Arruppadaï* poetry in the thirty-sixth Sūtra of *Purathinaiyal*. Further *Tolkappiar* elucidates the meaning of the nature of the award which the suppliant makes at the direction of the mature guide. It is *Kantali* which forms one of the three fruitful gains to be attained by worshipful devotion (Sūtra 33). In other words, the goal is to attain the transcendent One, who is beyond all ties and forms:

"Sarpināt ṭōnrāthu ṭālaruvai eporuṟku  
Mēyanint trenjnāṇṟum inṣam ṭagaiṭōr  
Vāimozhyāl vākāl manattāl arivilanta  
Tūymaiya tāna maitīr sudar."

Nakkirar's *Arruppadaï* exhorts the struggling mortals to strive for the wealth of immortal bliss. This reward can be attained only through inward pilgrimage which takes one away from the path of the senses:

"Pulam Pirinṭu urayum Selavu  
Nēe Nayanṭanai Yāyin."

T.M.G. 64.

Nakkirar in *Tirumurugarrupadai* builds up a new tradition of *Arruppadai* by which he enunciates, that in the process of salvation of the mortals, God's initiative is as intense as that of the devotee. Nakkirar invokes the grace of God Muruga to take the initiative and crown the devout seeker. In this poem, the guidance is given to Muruga by the Kūliyar or the matured enlightened Seers, who are already in possession of the grace of Muruga. That was the reason why Nakkirar's *Arruppadai* is named after Muruga as he is the One who is guided to come to his devotees true, in response to their supplication—

"Murugu Aaṟṟupadutha  
Urugelu Viannagar."

T.M.G. 244

According to Tolkāppiar, *Arruppadais* are named after the persons who are given guidance, and not named after the patrons who are the objects of the guidance. (Tol: puram: 30:) Nakkirar's *Arruppadai* seems apparently to be named after the patron who is the ultimate goal of the guidance. However in lines 284-285 of *Tirumurugarrupadai*, the Kūliyar or the attendants of Muruga appear on the festival grounds and draw the attention of Muruga to the earnest piety and spiritual fervour of the devotee, who has made this pilgrimage to Him, and who stands in need of His succour, moved as they are by his tuneful worship and praises of the Lord.

Thus it is evident that Nakkirar has not deviated from the traditional approach in his *Arruppadai*. Muruga is depicted as searching for the true devotee in order to shower his grace. The victorious leader of the Devas, the spiritual Guru of the righteous seers,

the great lover of the young, God Muruga is given guidance and His attention is drawn to the ripe maturity of a devotee who also with high yearning has worked his way up to obtain His grace. It is both an outer pilgrimage to the hallowed abodes of Muruga, as well as an inward odyssey of the spirit. This aspect of Muruga worship is worked out more fully by M.A. Dorairangaswamy in his work on "Anbu Neriye Tamilar Neri"—(p. 72).

All spiritual sojourn must be crowned by God's grace. A fervent devotee of Muruga—in this instance, it is poet Nakkirar—mediates with Muruga in the true role of a spiritual preceptor, to grant His benediction on the younger devotee who has been guided to come unto Him, with the ardent faith to receive His behest—that the Lord should turn His Eye of Grace on him, even as He has showered His Grace on the poet, and thus fulfil his supplication! This is Tamil Culture at its pinnacle! It is *Lokasamgraha*, the sovereign sway of Universal Love for all living beings! In the stinking culture of modernism with its tentacles of aggressive egoity and pride and perversion of eternal values, it is salutary to recite Nakkirar's poem on Muruga and quench the thirst that doth rise from the soul for a drink divine. Such is the full import of *Tirumurugārrupadai* which is named after Muruga.

In this Idyll, the favourite abodes of Muruga are described by the path-finder, whose main aim is to turn the doubters and wavering seekers to follow the right track, the royal way that shall lead each one of them to Lord Muruga. He dwells in special sanctuaries which are dedicated to His worship and termed

centres of encampment (Padaividu), reminding the followers that it was He who warred against the hordes of *Asuras*, forces intent on destroying the good and the righteous order of this world. This humble sojourner, this votary of Muruga, is bidden to arise and go, and go at once to the temples at Tirupparankunram, Tiru-cheeralavai, Kunruthōradal, Tiruvāvinangudi, Tiru-vēragam and Pazhamuthircholai, and worship Him tunefully and receive His Grace.

Muruga is all-pervading in every particle of the Universe, and while He is immanent in everything, everywhere and at all times, it is also true that man can experience an intimate nearness and presence in the temples specially dedicated to His worship. He cannot be seen nor heard, as He is beyond sight and sound; but the true Seer can see Him in every phase of Nature's beauty and ugliness, in the calm serene beauty of the pastures green and mountain peaks, as well as in the horrors and weird scenes of the grim battlefield and in the terrors of brute force. This alternating phase of light and darkness is brought out majestically by Nakkirar in this poem of poems.

### *The Poetic Crescendo:*

In this Idyll, it is not a King or a chieftain who is extolled by the bard, Nakkirar. He points the Way that shall lead a seeker to Muruga; it is the path of light, love and loveliness. The goal is Lord Muruga, the exalted Son of Siva, the victorious Lord whose abodes are endowed with such power and charm, that the guide extols His glory in the most fascinating yet baffling melodious poesy, where nature, man and cele-



stial Devas enact a moving pageantry, and realise the award of the boon of Grace from the living presence of Muruga. Unlike Dante who beholds at a distance the Beatific Vision with the sweet river of Light dividing him, poet Nakkirar transmutes the dross of the earth into the molten gold of divine wisdom, and sees Muruga, Lord of heroic feats and wisdom, hears his word of Truth and experiences his Love—the *summum bonum* of Life, in blissful communion.

Let us examine Nakkirar's approach to Muruga, which is unique in its appeal. He is a peerless devotee of Muruga, steadfast in the pursuit of the Way that leads to Muruga; he exhorts the people to strive to acquire the spiritual wealth from this treasure cave. The reward is for those who make the inward odyssey to His abodes of wisdom found within each man:

“With a heart imbued with love and purity,  
And a will tuned to do His bidding in virtuous  
acts,  
If you seek His abodes, then shall be fulfilled  
All your cherished desires and objects.”

T.M.G. 62-66.

In this Arruppadaï of Nakkirar, we get some poetic gems of purest ray serene, and soul-stirring descriptions of God Muruga and His abodes. We find exhilarating pen pictures of nature as the seat of His glory, of the sea and sky, hills and forests, fields and pastures, (Neithal, Kurinchi, Mullai and Marutham regions classified by Tolkappiar), of the sun and moon, of trees and flowers and the song of birds and prowess of animals. We cannot see God, neither can

we hear Him; we can neither sense Him nor know Him. But the true Seer sees Him in every phase of Nature's beauty and hears Him in every rustle of the wind and senses His joy in every note of the kuyil bird.

Like Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Nakkirar's poetic theme is pitched to the highest chord of praise unto the Divine Jyoti. Muruga is depicted as the luminous Child, the refreshing youth radiating love and vitality, the young warrior who commands the immense array of heavenly hosts and earthly forces, the power of the *Bhutaganas* and the milieu of the nether worlds; He is the enlightened embodiment of Siva, the sun of wisdom. Thus we see that Nakkirar conjures in all his poetic imagery, the concept of Muruga as testified in the local religious tradition, and in the legends.

Nakkirar delineates the types and modes of worship of this peerless God in his grand Idyll. The lovers worship him with music and dance, and congregate in the open fields, or near the waterfalls; the priestly class worship Him with elaborate rites and ceremonies; the warriors celebrate his banner and lance; the rustic with foodgrains and sacrificial offerings; the aboriginal Veddas invoke Him with intoxicating drink and dance *veriyādal*. The devout aspirant meditates on him in silence, adoring Him as the Supreme God, the giver of all that is beneficial—Subrahmanya.

Muruga is the all-pervading Spirit of the Universe, the Essence from which all things are evolved,

by which they are sustained, and into which they are involved. Out of gracious compassion for the suffering humanity, He takes forms sometimes as the youthful God of Love, the mystic Child of Wisdom or the God of War in order to crush the forces of evil. He also appeals to the true seekers after the riches of the Kingdom of God, as the Divine Child Muttukumaran, a type of perennial tender beauty, always and everywhere wafting fragrance to rescue his devotees, with his consorts—Valli and Devayānai, who are the instruments of His Grace unto humanity and celestial beings.

As a literary poem, *Tirumurugarrupadai* is of great interest to all lovers of art and poesy. When we unravel its scintillating beauty, we also comprehend its profound religious meaning. It unfolds elements of poetry and drama combined with music—the three major aspects of Tamil literary tradition. The poem is made up of six scenes. God Muruga is represented as having taken His abode in six sacrosanct shrines, five of which are specific locations and Kunrutōrādal has no particular shrine. Symbolically His six faces find their resting place in each of the six abodes. The seeker is bidden to undertake a pilgrimage and worship Him in Tirupparankunram, Tirucheeralavai, Tiruvāvinankudi, Tiruvērakam, Kunrutōrādal and Pazhamuthircholai.

Within this general framework, we discover the literary technique of Arruppadai, the way to Muruga depicted in six different forms and patterns of worship by six different types of adherents or worshippers. Each one of the six scenes is composed of a

single unit of long--winding sentences, consisting of diction so profound, condensed in meaning, so that within the general ambit, each of the sentence structure is so broken up as to release a few clearly defined pictures arranged systematically, centering round *Muruga, the object of worship*; the devotees swing round his orbit as *subjects with nature* around as the stage, on which the drama of man in his relationship to Muruga is enacted; Nature is the witness.

In this triangular panorama, the *stage* by which we mean the world of nature, the abode (Padaividu) becomes at some point or other, the focal centre, where the poet has worked out his exquisite artistry. At another time, it is the object, the adorable Muruga who steals full attention and delicate details of His form, adornments, smiles, and actions add lustre to the poem. Lastly, we get scintillating pictures of the worshippers, the procession of devas, mortals, and the gamut of the celestial and human pageantry seeking Him, praising Him and supplicating unto Him in diverse ways and modes. Thus *Muruga, His Abodes* and His gravitational pull on the fervent devotees who revolve round His axis—these three centrifugal pivots grip our hearts and minds and hold us spell-bound. The one in three and three in six and six by six reveal to us the pinnacle of the sublime truth of Religion. This indeed is great poetry and even if the peculiar halo of religion embodied in this poem were to wane at some unknown future in the history of mankind, this poem of poems will live on in eternity, as a peerless work of art.

Thus we trace the continuity of the cult of

Muruga worship in Tamil Nād from ancient times to the modern period, and find that Muruga is a living force today and rests upon an old tradition. Tamil literature, archaeology, epigraphy and iconography supply several kinds of data in this interesting study of Muruga cult, and this continuity is one of the main features of our study. Purānas record the legends—legends praising holy places, temples and thirthams, and explain the images; whereas technical treatises like the Silpasastras, Kriyapaada of the Agamas and Tantras like Kumaratantra give the rules to build temples and to make the images and conduct pujas. The Tamil literature like *Paripadal*, *Tirumurugarrupadai*, *Kandapurānam* and *Tiruppugazh* reveal the intense piety of the devotees who built and worshipped in the temples of Muruga, and illustrate their emotional feelings and thoughts. An attempt has been made to utilise Tamil literary sources for the correct appreciation of the indissoluble links between the monuments and the religious thought and practice of the Tamils in regard to the worship of Muruga in Tamil Nād.



## THE POEM—THE WAY TO LORD MURUGA

### TIRUPPARANKUNRAM

*Behold the Sun, Dispeller of Darkness: 1-11*

The world rejoices and the many adore  
As the Sun of Glory riseth above the Sea  
Radiating its gleaming luminosity afar  
In its diurnal ascent around the Mount.  
Behold in its lustre His *lofty Feet*  
Trampling ignorance while upholding their love.  
His *mighty arms* like thunderbolt wiping out foes.  
He's the spouse of flawless gleaming forehead—  
Devayānai.

Lo, the dark clouds laden with draughts from the sea  
Scatter their dense raindrops in the luminous sky  
And confer the first showers on the balmy forest  
glades.

Fresh and cool appear those broad red Kadamba trees,  
Whose round crimson flowers play on His fair Chest  
Adorning it in the form of a fragrant garland.

*The blooms of Love unfolding in the Dance of Beauty:*  
12-44.

On the towering mountains where high bamboos grow  
Are the groves where celestial Maids display their  
valour;

Their dainty roseate feet tinkle with anklets  
Their shapely legs, swaying waist, and graceful arms  
Arrayed in glittering raiment of radiant hue,  
Their hips embellished with chain of multi-gems  
Their beauty so artless and immaculate  
Enhanced by bright jewels of purest gold;  
Their mien so flawless, decked with petals  
Of Kuvalai embedded in stalks of Vetchi red;  
Their curled hair adorned with Seedeivi and  
Valampuri

The "Makarai pakuvai" pendant on the fragrant  
forehead

Marked by 'tilak', while the knotted hair behind  
Circled by lovely champaka bloom with marutha  
sprays;

The eardrops of Asoka shoots dangle gracefully;  
The comely breasts touched with fragrant sandal paste  
On which were strewn the pollen of Venkai blooms;  
These fearless nymphs so alluring in their sport  
Pick the tender shoots of woodapple and throw at  
each other,

They sing in praise of the banner of the Chanticleer.  
In the dales so enchanting these damsels dance around  
And their dulcet music resounds up the mountain  
peaks,

Flanked by dense trees where bees nor monkeys stalk.  
There blooms the Gloriosa Superba in flaming hues  
From which are made the fragrant garland wreath  
That adorns His Crown in splendour fine.

*The blooms of Love unfolding in the Dance of Terror:*

45-61.

The resplendent leaf-shaped lance of mighty fame  
The *Victorious Lance* of the ever youthful Lord,  
Pierced the cold rocky cliffs embedded in the sea,  
And cut asunder causing dread to the dual Form  
Of Suran, the warrior hero of the Titans who hid  
Beneath drooping clusters of the uprooted Mango tree.  
The hideous demoness with frizzy hair and canine  
teeth,

Green eyes with whirling eyeballs, wide mouths and  
fierce look,

Ears from which blinking owls and deadly snakes  
twine

On to the heaving shoulders, rough belly and tinkling  
hands

With sharp nailed cruel fingers claw at the eyes  
Of dark skulls that emit a putrid stench.

This repugnant fiend with mouth full of carrion fat  
Sings paeans of praise to the battle-field so eerie,  
That strikes great terror into giant's hearts;  
She treads the Thunkai dance and thus celebrates  
His Victory.

The flawless lance so red, of the Lord of boundless  
fame

Dimmed their glory, inspiring fear and dread,  
Cut in twain the Chief of the Asuric hosts,  
Who bears two names but has one body gigantic,  
Who hid neath the mango tree upon whose boughs  
Hang drooping branches with blossoms bright.

*The Goal of Roseate Feet: 62-67.*

If with piety and merit of former birth,

Thou doth aspire to the goal of liberation,  
 Strive for the wisdom that radiates  
 From virtuous deeds, and may yearning sweet  
 For His roseate Feet animate Thy mind,  
 And lead thee to attainment divine.

*The Holy Mount: 68-77.*

Hearken! He dwelleth on the Mount, west of the  
 City

Whose towers and gates freed from the snares  
 Of wars with all the foes routed, display  
 The sign of ball and doll dangling on the flagstaff  
 In whose wealthy masts and palatial streets Lakshmi  
 abides.

'Tis the Hill where winged bees rest on stalks of  
 lotuses

That bloom in the muddy ponds across the vast fields,  
 While at dawn they hum around the honey laden  
 flowers;

And with the light of the rising Sun, they gleefully  
 buzz

Among the scented flowers as they unfold their petals.  
 Such is the Mount of Beauty where He abides in joy  
 'Tis not this alone.

TIRUCHEERALAVAI (TIRUCHENDUR)

*The Triumphant Return: 78-88.*

The Elephant's head scarred deep with sharp goad,  
 Adorned with unfading garland and golden shield,  
 Bells of rhythmic peals resound on either side  
 Powerful as Yama, fleet as the risen wind;  
 The elephant rides swiftly carrying the Lord aloft.

The crown of beauteous gems in pentagon shape  
Glow's like lightning's flash and his golden drops  
Shine like starry sheen swinging round the moon  
Who doth illumine distant firmaments.

*The Glorious Form of Muruga: 89-103.*

In disciplined hearts of sages kindled with love,  
Lo! the glorious Form of Muruga blooms in radiance;  
That the world be freed from dense darkness  
One face illumines by diverse beams of grace;  
That those who seek His Love be blessed with boons,  
One face responds in melting love to their behest;  
That no ills befall the devout who offer oblation  
Ordained in the sacred Vedas, one Face benign takes  
care;  
That the Seers be enlightened on the many hidden  
truths.  
One Face resplendent illumines every quarter like  
the moon;  
That the Titanic foes be vanquished and victory  
celebrated,  
One Face assumes infernal wrath, equanimity desisted.  
One Face for ever rejoices in the company of Valli,  
The slender youthful veddha maid of peerless love;  
Thus do these six faces, each its role fulfil.

*His All-Embracing Dynamism: 104-118.*

On his broad brave shoulders rest luminous weapons  
That could cleave the bodies of foes in majestic might;  
Behold the triple fold of his bejewelled chest  
Lo, one arm is held aloft to guard the celestial seers,  
While other arm reclines at ease on his waist;  
One arm wields the elephant goad,



And one arm rests on His well clad thigh;  
 Two other arms twirl the wondrous lance and shield;  
 One arm reposes on his chest, while the other  
 Arm with sweet scented garlands decked;  
 One arm waves aloft in grace with armlet donned;  
 The other arm rings the bell of double peal;  
 One arm showers rains from dark blue clouds,  
 The other arm crowns celestial brides;  
 Thus the arms twelve in number perform their role,  
 In consonance sweet with His faces six.

*The Victorious Return: 119-125*

List! Heavenly drums and strong horns blow aloud,  
 White conch shells and drums resound like thunder;  
 The peacock with variegated plumes so beautiful  
     sways  
 On the victorious banner of Muruga,  
 As he speeds up the aerial way with rapid pace,  
 And alights in the famed city of Tiruchiralavai.  
 'Lo! his munificence in abodes of this nature; and  
     besides these.

TIRUVAVINANKUDI

*The Processional March: 126-147.*

In garments of bark these hoary seers are clad,  
 Their braided hair gleaming white like valampuri  
     conch,  
 Their body so immaculately clean and fair,  
 Their high chest of bony ribs wrapped in deer skin,  
 Bodies lean with austere meals after days of fast;  
 Their minds unsullied and free of guile and hate;  
 They're wise beyond the wisdom of the learned;

They act as the goal and pivot of the knowers  
Free from anger, greed and sufferings sore;  
With cheerful hearts and gracious mien  
They lead the way.

While soft voiced gandharvas, spotless in mistlike  
robes

Decked with garlands of freshly opened buds,  
Their swaying bodies not subject to human ills,  
Adept in playing well-tuned instruments like yal  
Art seen in merry company, mates of matchless love,  
Their golden hue like sheen of mango's tender shoots,  
Their beauty spots scintillating, and waists  
Adorned with lustrous strands and gems.  
Their guileless joy ripples in melodies sweet  
As they wend their way.

*The Godly Deputation:* 148-167.

Behold Vishnu with the banner of the falcon,  
Whose striped curved wings smite to death  
The fierce dread dragon of eerie hiss that spouts  
Deadly venom with its bellowed teeth so sharp.  
He is the divine guardian of the world with cities  
That gleam with temples four to the Devas four  
The Lord of Uma comes with victorious flag of white  
bull,

Valiant shoulders has He and ever-open triple eyes;  
The adorable One who razed the topless towers of  
Tripura;

Gallant Indra of thousand eyes follows, his fame far  
spread  
For routing his foes with hundred sacrifices well  
performed.

He rides aloft on his four-tusked elephant white,  
Majestic in gait with the trunk swinging stately.

Then come the thrice thirty wise, in forms diverse  
 They belong to classes Four, great seers of Truth  
 Who are untrammelled by diversity quaint.  
 In the rear are eighteen Ganas of high esteem  
 They all wend their way to intercede on behalf  
 Of the deluded Brahma, four faced and lotus born  
 That He be restored, deathless thro' aeons.

*Intercession:* 168-177.

To his ancient duty of creation so that the Tri-Unity  
 As of yore be enlivened too in their distinct duties.  
 Their brightness is that of the twinkling stars;  
 Their pace is that of the wind on the risen sea;  
 Their might is that of the wind swept fire;  
 Their voice is like that of thunder emitting fire;  
 In harmonious array o'er the heavens they move on  
 To Avinankudi where with chaste pure love by His  
     side,

He abides for a time, seen and sought by  
 Celestials for boons to regain their lost glory.

## TIRUVERAKAM

*The Traditional Worship:* 178-189.

The priestly class not failing in their duties six,  
 Blest with high lineage on both sides, well esteemed,  
 Full forty-eight years of life span well spent  
 In vedic lore and consecrated life—  
 Keen in imparting the Truth of holy scriptures,  
 They tend the sacrificial fire of three-fold type  
 Wearing the sacred thread of thrice triple strands;  
 These twice-born, tuned to the hour of worship  
 In wet clothes clad, and palms uplifted o'erhead,  
 Laud themselves and chant the vedic lore,

Enshrined in the secret word of letters six,  
Oft repeated and flowers offered at proper time.  
Thus they glorify Him and for such worship,  
Our Lord doth dwell in Eragam, in joyful bliss.

### KUNRUTHORADAL

*The Worship of the Highland Clan:* 190-217.

The dwellers of forest hills armed with fatal bows,  
Their chests bright with the perfumed sandal paste,  
Revel with their highland clan sipping strong mead  
From honey combs ripened on tall bamboos;  
They enjoy the Kurava dance to the music  
Of the thondaka drum with their fair maids  
Whose modest gait like peahens doth please.  
Their tresses decked with finger tipped lilies  
Plucked from the deep pool as bee clustering buds  
Whose pistils of natural odour waft sweet perfume.  
Their waists are bedecked with draping foliage,  
White clusters of red stemmed Kadamba  
Interspersed with Kullai flowers where bees can feed.

*Velan, the Lancer:*

Right in their midst steps Velan, the Lancer lithe  
His garlands are of wild jasmins and white kuthalam,  
Knotted with scented nutmeg and luscious berries.  
Fair complexioned and clad in crimson hue,  
His ears are decked with tender red ixora shoots.  
He's attired in kilt with marshal anklets tinkling,  
And the wreath of vetchi blooms crowns his head.  
He blows the horn and raises melodious music  
As he strides on the peacock with the ram behind,  
The flawless banner of the cock is raised aloft;

Adorned with armlets, waist tucked with trailing robes,

His stature rises as he roves with bands of singers,  
 Their voices sweet as notes of well-tuned lutes.  
 His hands, strong as the Malavi drum, clasp  
 Those of the soft shouldered and fawn like maids;  
 And they swing to the lilt of the Kuravai dance.  
 Thus his sporting spirit doth pervade the hills in glee.

### PAZHAMUTHIRCHOLAI—THE FRUIT GROVE

*Sanctified Abodes of Worship: 218-226.*

His presence all pervasive doth permeate  
 In every hamlet where festive season holds sway,  
 Where rams are sacrificed and cock banners hoisted;  
 In every abode where devotees invoke Him  
 Whether it be the oracular sacrificial site  
 Where the genial dancer springs his frenzied dance;  
 Or in woods and groves, lakes and rivers,  
 In lovely islets and diverse shrines,  
 At junctions meet where cross roads diverge,  
 Or at the foot of the kadamba trees in bloom,  
 Under the shady greenwood trees, in public forums,  
 In hallowed sheep-cotes, *there He abides surely.*

*The Mystic Rituals: 227-240.*

In the awe-inspiring hamlets among forest glades,  
 The tribe of those who live by the chase,  
 Invoke Muruga to the chagrin of the infidels.  
 They fix his cock banner regal in a decorous place,  
 Their foreheads besmeared with ghee and mustard  
 white;  
 Softly do they chant the mystic incantation,  
 Strewing flowers with animated gesture of hands;



Their loins girded in two-fold garments,  
The occult red cord fastened to their wrists,  
They sprinkle white fried rice and offer oblation  
Of white rice mixed with blood of ram so hale;  
And several offerings in salvers many,  
Fragrant sandal paste with saffron is sprayed;  
Festoons of fresh red oleanders sway in corded rows,  
Whence Muruga's blessings are invoked  
For the weal of the highland hamlets.  
They offer incense and sing the songs of Kurinchi.

*The Symphony of Praise: 241-248.*

List to the melody of musical instruments  
That mingle with that of the rippling brooks.  
Diverse blooms of lustrous glow are showered  
Mixed with millet soaked with blood.  
The kurava poised thus, performs an impassioned  
dance

To the stirring music of the thunkaka drum;  
While other votaries blow their many horns,  
And make the hallowed place vibrate anon,  
With their songs and peals of terrific bells.  
They magnify the puissant elephant and peacock,  
And implore Him to grant their heart's desire.  
In all these places doth He abide in grace.

*The Prayer of the Heart: 249-254.*

In this way have I known His Graciousness;  
Whether in these abodes or in other haunts,  
Where'er thou dost confront Him, be in tune  
To praise Him, your face in utter gladness beaming,  
Your hands uplifted above your head in worship;  
Do thou prostrate yourself in surrender, full and fit,  
And in this manner raise thy voice of prayer;

*Adoration: 255-270.*

Beloved Lord! Thou wert borne by fire,  
The purest of the elements five  
And the blue balmy waters of the pool  
Nestling over the high Himachal's peak,  
Did'st nurture whence these six Forms  
Looked after by six maids became One.  
Thou Son of Siva seated under the banyan tree!  
Child art Thou of the daughter of great Himavat!  
Harbinger of Death for thine enemies!  
Thou dear Son of victorious Goddess Ganga!  
Oh! Babe of the sylvan Goddess well adorned!  
Thou General of the suppliant hosts  
Of celestials who wield the curved bows!  
Thou Seer renowned with garlands decked!  
Thou art matchless in war, triumphant in youth—  
Treasure art Thou to the sages genial!  
Thou, summit of the words of the exalted,  
Spouse most dear to consorts Valli and Devayanai!  
Thou who art like the bull among the valiant—  
Oh priceless wielder of the spear so powerful!  
Thou Lord of towering hills, ruler of Kurinchi!  
Sovereign Lord, who split the rock of illusion!  
Exalted Hero art Thou to illustrious bards—  
Great Muruga! whom none can excel—  
Thy glory infinite 'tis hard to attain.  
Praise be Thou who bestows freely thy largess,  
The blooms of blessed love on all who yearn.

*Love's Crescendo: 271-276.*

Divine child with golden jewels bedecked,  
Thou art the refuge of those in anguish.  
Vanquisher with emblazoned chest exultant!

Luminous Love, saviour of the needy meek!  
Whose hallowed name the enlightened extol.  
Thou mighty conqueror who confoundeth titans,  
Dauntless victor, Thou Supreme Lord Divine!

*The Victory of Faith: 277-286.*

Thus spake the Guide;  
When you've thus magnified His praise,  
In the way made tangible by me—  
In consonance also with your measure of love,  
Reaffirm your pledge of faith in Him thus!  
Thou who doth elude human comprehension,  
Non-pareil of Wisdom Divine, Truth Absolute,  
I've come unto Thee, Thy Holy Feet seeking—  
Ere you could end your plea so imploring,  
A retinue of minions diverse and minute appear,  
In the festive sight with buoyant air,  
And usher you into His Presence, pleading thus:  
"Lo Supreme Lord! a bard of mature wisdom,  
Yearning for Thy far-famed beneficence,  
And deserving Thy compassion profound,  
Hath come glorifying Thee in words sweet and meek".

*Fear Thee Not: 287-295.*

His immaculate Form, majestic and mighty,  
Divine in strength, and stature reaching skyward  
Manifests itself in sublime splendour.  
His fiery form instantly He conceals  
To one of genial youth and utters words of love:  
"Thy coming I know, fear thee not!  
Thou shalt surely excel in this world,  
Girt by the furious oceans deep and vast,  
Be thou One indeed, without a parallel"—thus saying,

He will grant everlasting worthy boons,  
Rare indeed to attain by mortals weak.

*The Paeon of Nature:* 296-314.

The swift stream rushing thro' deep ravines,  
Like varied flags tossing to and fro,  
Bears logs of akil and trunks of sandalwood;  
Uproots bamboos 'with flower-laden stems,  
Sweeps aside the redolent cool honeycombs,  
On cliffs whose top resembles the sun's disc;  
The juicy pulp of the ripe jack fruits that fall  
In the stream gets mixed up with (scented) blooms  
Of Punnai trees that grow on hill tops high.  
Black apes and gorillas tremble at the rumbling;  
While she-elephants with freckled foreheads shiver.  
The he-elephants leap in the torrential waters;  
Their pearly tusks splashing dust of gold and gems;  
The stems of plantain trees drift forth  
And jostle against the coconut palms,  
Whose leaves and tender nuts drop down.  
The clusters of black pepper blooms bend down,  
The peacocks of speckled plumage and modest gait  
Flee in dismay and so do peahens strong.  
In caverns lie boars concealed in lairs,  
Bears too run about with curved backs,  
Their grisly hair dark like the palmyrah fibre,  
The dim horned bisons wild set up a roar.

*The current of Grace:* 315-317.

He is the Lord of the Mount from whose dizzy heights,  
Many a cataract doth spin torrential falls—Lord of  
Abundant fruit groves too where luscious fruits ripen.

## THE PILGRIMAGE PAR EXCELLENCE

We have seen that the Poet Laureate Nakkirar whose literary encounter with Siva is recorded history, extols Muruga as a supreme object of worship in that great poem *Tirumurugarrupadai* and portrays the hallowed sanctuaries where diverse types of votaries of God Muruga congregated. The devotion of the Tamils from remote antiquity, as indicated in the many references from the first to the third Academy of Letters, to their patron Deity Muruga-Velan-Arumuga, made them remember Him in the ebb and flow of their lives, in the days and hours of joyful praise bestowed on Him; they also hailed Him as a guardian God who filled their environment and existence with the vitality, vigour and valour of His universal presence. They worshipped Him in the secret recesses of their hearts, in silent solitudes, individually and apart and they also worshipped Him in large congregations, on special festival days and seasons. So pilgrimages from one sanctified place to another evolved as part of the Hindu religious tradition of the Tamils. It became an essential aspect of their worship, as significant as their invigorating dances (*veriyādal*, *Kuravaikūtu* etc.) and festivals.



In *Tirumurugarrupadai*, we find that a fortified tonic is offered to any pilgrim who knocks at the door of the enlightened guide or Guru, and entreats him to show the way to the goal of realisation of Muruga. The response of the guide, who is already a pilgrim par excellence is magnetic. He assures this timid pilgrim-poet of success in his undertaking.

“Thou shalt surely achieve thy earnest objective and be rewarded with Muruga’s grace. Art thou not a lover of Muruga? Thy pure heart purged of all dross, doth remember His holy name and feet constantly. Thou hast performed goodly deeds and service meritorious in this life and also in the previous lives. Hence Thou hast stored enough wisdom. In single-minded detachment to worldly enjoyments, and steadfast attachment to Muruga’s Holy Feet, shall you experience His bliss. Release from pain and change is possible only for those illumined ones, who follow the path which shall lead them to Muruga”. T.M.G. 62-67.

The Master guide—in this case it is Nakkirar—thus portrays a true insight into the nature of the supreme Godhead, the preparation needful for the pilgrimage and an analysis of the abodes; he states the aims in view and the means to attain it, the modes of worship and the attainment at the journey’s end to an inexperienced pilgrim who yearns to set out on such an eventful pilgrimage.

There are abodes specially consecrated to the worship of Muruga, who chose these sites as His citadels according to tradition to encamp His army in

His warfare against the Asuric forces of Surapadman. One such sanctified place is the holy mount of *Paran* or Supreme one, and it is also known as *Tirupparankunram*. The ancient Tamils cherished objects of beauty and in the hills and peaks where stalked the peacock and the elephant, where nature put on her rainbow-coloured flowers and clouds, and where leaped rivulets and mountain streams, they deified the Guardian Deity in Muruga, and worshipped Him as the overlord of the hilly (Kurinchi) region. They elevated Him and looked upon the mountain tops as His dwelling places away from the madding crowd's ignoble strife; they looked up to Him nestled in the heights for inspiration and as a testimony of their aspiration for divine bliss, they wended their way in annual pilgrimages.

Among many such hilly abodes of Muruga, *Tirupparankunram* stands out as a sanctuary of great beauty, some six miles to the south-west of Madurai, the once-famed capital city of the Pandyan Kings. This mount is described by Nakkirar in his famous poem as the first of the six fortresses or encampments (*padaividu*) of Muruga. The warrior hero Muruga according to *Tirumurugarrupadai* had six operational centres, where he gathered his forces and launched his affray against the inimical hordes of the Asuras, and having conquered these mighty foes, He returned with his victorious hosts to celebrate in each of these abodes, the sacrificial victory.

*Tirucheeralavai* or Tiruchendur is another of His abiding fortresses, from where He launched his onslaught in the last phase of his war against the Asuric

leader, Surapadman, who had assumed the form of an upturned mango tree in the mid-ocean. He has his habitation in *Tiruvavinangudi* (Palani) and in *Tiruveragam*. Besides these places, He makes his holy presence felt among the hilly fortresses *Kunruthōradal*—and sequestered peaks; in hamlets where festivals are celebrated or wherever his devotees call him, He appears to them there, and whenever the mystic priest called Velan in rituals gallant, invokes his aid in the midst of rapturous dances, He heeds the call; at the foot of the kadamba tree in bloom or in the cross-roads, doth He appear to those who seek him. He dwells in the hearts of those love-intoxicated highland belles, who shower boons in His name on those that throng round these places of worship.

In these varied ways doth He make his presence fruitful and exuberant. The secret of his communion is to sing His praises incessantly, and even so Nakkirar admonishes the aspirant to be aware of the inadequacy of his adoration, as Muruga surpasses all that is on earth and no mortal can ever comprehend his sublime greatness. Even before the supplication to obtain the boon of His divine feet has been uttered by the pilgrim-devotee, the attendants on Muruga, called *Kūliyar* in the poem, are moved to pity; they intercede on his behalf and implore the master to take him under His protection and shower His grace on this sincere pilgrim-seeker, who had extolled His praise and spread His glories far and wide.

This was the grand moment when the Lord of *Pazhaamuthircholai* transfigured Himself from the divine Cosmic Form of terrible majesty, to that of

the entrancing young Muruga and blessed the poet with His vision so adorable. He spoke such words of good cheer that He knew of his coming and of the object of his pilgrimage, and urged this devotee to cast off all fear, He bequeathed to him the beatific gift of grace and strengthened his purposes in this world and enabled him to radiate light upon others. Such is the manifestation, the presence and power of Muruga who is enshrined in these sanctified temples. They have been singled out by Nakkirar because of their fame as the abodes where Gods, devas and mortals met to worship Muruga and perpetuate the glory of His valour against the forces of evil as well as shower His love and grace. In spite of the vicissitudes of the history of the Tamils in South India, these abodes of Muruga have retained their sanctity up to the present century, and they continue to ignite the hearts of true worshippers of Muruga, as witnessed in the huge crowds that throng these shrines during annual festivals today.

## TIRUPPARANKUNRAM—THE MOUNT OF BEAUTY

*Tirupparankunram* is one thousand and fifty feet above sea level. It is also called *Tirupparangiri*, *Kandamātanam*, *Kandamalai*, *Satyagiri*, and *Parankunram*. The Muslims call this mount as *Sikkantar*, and have erected a mosque on top of the hill. The Sangam poets of the early centuries, the Devaram saints and St. Arunagir in athor and Kachiappa guruparar have all sung its praises. The beautiful setting of this hill with its lotus ponds, trailing carpets of flowers and swarms of bees and water fronts are described in *Tirumurugarrupadai*.

The opening lines of the poem lend support to the traditional belief that Muruga, after his victory over Surapadman, was married to Indra's daughter Devayānai in this abode. Also in this shrine, Muruga gave protection to the sons of sage Parāsarar. Here too He is said to have saved Nakkirar and his 999 companions from captivity and death. He set right the injured finger of the lady devotee who chanted His name ceaselessly. As the eternal abode of Muruga, *Paripādal* celebrates its eminence by comparing it to the Himalayas, because all the devas and

saints congregate in this holy hill to worship Muruga, as they do at Kailas for Siva. The streaming devotees wending their way from Madurai with their offerings of flowers and fruits, the young damsels singing poems of praise to Muruga, who beckons them from his lofty mount, afford pleasing pictures in the *Paripādal* poems.

In later ages, St. Arunagiri and Kumaraguruparar have sung many odes in praise of Muruga, whose favourite resort was at Tirupparankunram, extolled as a mount of beauty. Muruga is honoured here by the special name of Kandasamy and Shanmuganathan.

The temple of Muruga is on the northern side of the hill and has fine architectural and sculptural landmarks. There is the Peacock's Hall leading to Āsthana Mandapam with sixteen pillars, surrounded by fifty high pillars, carved skilfully and delineating the legendary story of Muruga. The Gopuram is about one hundred and fifty feet high, and inside the temple is the Kalyāna Mandapam skirted by the sacred pool and the temple gardens. As one ascends the steps, he comes to the flagstaff and gently climbing to the higher dais he is in sight of the inner sanctuary of Muruga. The holiest of holies is carved out of a rock and besides Muruga's well-chiselled form can be seen the images of *Karpāha Vināyagā*, *Satyagirinātha*, *Durgadevi*, and *Vishnu* known as *Perumāl*. There is also an image of Nakkirar, the author of *Tirumurugarrupadai*. No immersion ceremony is conducted in this sanctum except to the Lance (*Vēl*) and the shrine is dedicated to the element of Earth—*Prithivi*.



In the garbha sanctuary is seen the rock-hewn form of Muruga with Lance and above him are the Sun and Moon, and on his either side are the Siddha Vidhyathar, Brahma, Indra, Saraswathi, Nārada and Devayānai Amman. Below are the goats, cocks, elephants and peacocks. Evidently this is the procession of Gods, seers, men and animals who had come to this mount to witness the wedding of Muruga to Devayānai Amman. Muruga is the divine bridegroom exuberantly joyful and confers freely boons on all his devotees from this happy tabernacle.

*Tirupparankunram, as seen by the Poet Nakkirar:*

Let us now turn to the first scene of our canticle. The stage is *Tirupparankunram*. The *Pilgrim-seeker* gazes intently at the holy mount. *Muruga*, the goal of his mission beckons to him from His hallowed abode. This is the unifying experience condensed in the incantation on *Tirupparankunram* consisting of a single statement of seventy-seven lines.

*The supreme One is the consort of the Goddess with the lustrous forehead. She is Devayānai. He is Muruga. She is Love. He is Beauty, surrounded by the enchanting mount. The image of the sun is delineated in the opening lines in all its majesty, rising above the expanse of the blue waters of the sea, dispelling the gloom of the night and adored by all as the harbinger of light and activity, productivity and joy.*

In the Svetasvatara Upanishad is a verse where God is depicted as the sun. "I see the great Purusha, sunlike beyond the darkness. A man who knows

Him truly passes over death; there is no other path to go." (III. 8). That Purusha is the mover of existence. He possesses the purest power of reaching everything. He is light.

The poet depicts Muruga as riding in the luminous sky on his peacock, after the conquest of the hostile hosts and restoring the Gods to their rightful status. He takes his abode at Tirupparankunram, where the Gods celebrate his marriage with the daughter of Indra. "He showers his grace on votaries who seek *His Lofty Feet*."

The sun's rays penetrate the physical gloom, while that of Muruga's powerful arms chase the inner impurity and darkness. In His role as creator and protector, he is represented as the consort of *Devayānai*—His inherent energy known also as *Kriya Sakti*. T.M.G. 5-7.

*The Supreme one wears the fragrant garland of red kadamba flowers round the chest.* This picture is expanded by the poet who visualises the sylvan glades of the Kurinchi terrain, putting on fresh foliage and flowers after the vernal showers of rain. Here, the bees exult in glee and blossoms waft their fragrance far and wide. This crimson garland adorns *His chest*—the parched hillsides and dales are refreshed by the rains. So also are the scorched hearts revived by the draught of Muruga's grace. T.M.G. 10-14.

*The Supreme One is radiant with the crown of roseate gloriosa superba flowers.* They bloom on the unfrequented mountain slopes flanked by dense trees.

It is here that the celestial damsels pipe their dulcet music and dance around in alluring sport, decked in delicate finery, their beauty so entrancingly sweet. T.M.G. 42-45.

*The Supreme—He wields the red javelin.* This is the mighty weapon that wrought such havoc and overpowered the titanic Asuras in the grim battle-field. It is here where the diabolic demoness eats the eyes of the fallen and holds the dance of terror. The flawless lance, so blood-red, portends fear to the arrogant foe, and augurs fame to the wielder. It is the conflict of the forces of righteousness against the powers of evil, and the flaming lance dazzles the danger signal in its victorious conquest. T.M.G. 56-60.

So captivating is Muruga, the goal so endearingly depicted by the poet, so tuneful is his worship by the celestial maids, and so rapturous is the zeal of the demons who revel in Muruga's victory, that the pilgrim-seeker is guided to reinforce his faith before he sets out on his quest. "If you want to tread the path that shall lead you to Muruga, then you surely need a pure heart where His feet are imprinted in love, a heart pulsating with the goodly deeds in this birth, and wisdom treasured from the effect of virtuous acts of previous births". T.M.G. 63-66.

God-realisation is not an easy task. Arduous is the preparation of the seeker. Love, purity by means of virtuous acts, and illumination will lead one to Him. *The Supreme*, He dwells on the hill so peaceful, in imperishable joy. Everything in the hill

spells beauty and everlasting happiness and magnetises the seeker to arise and stop not till the goal is reached. It is not this alone.

Tirupparankunram has continued to preserve its pristine beauty and holiness even to this day. Sang St. Tirugnanasambandar of this Mount: "Those who worship this Mount will get rid of all ills."

St. Sundarar following him has immortalised this holy Hill in his Cantos where he makes reference to his adoration of the Mount in the company of the Chera, Chola and Pandyan Kings and assures that all those who sing its praise will enjoy exalted bliss.

St.. Arunagirinathar also has sung many heart-melting songs in praise of this Mount of Grace.

The path to Tirupparankunram that was opened by Nakkirar nearly two thousand years ago, still beckons us. The guide turns his lens towards another abode of Muruga and bids the pilgrim to follow him.

## TIRUCHEERALAVAI—THE ABODE OF FULFILMENT

In a trail of blazing glory, the Poet depicts the grandeur of this abode of Muruga. Its glories had been sung by poets from very ancient times. Tolkaṭṭiār makes reference to this coastal shrine swept by the billows, "Murugan Thimpuna Alaivay."

Numerous are the allusions to this sacred abode of Muruga in the age of the Academy of Letters, which held sway up to the third century A.D. In *Purananuru*, there is a reference to the foaming white waves of Sentil. *Ahananuru* refers to it as a place of holy lustre: Aham. 266 "Alaivai Tirumani Valaku". In *Silappadigaram*, Ilanko calls it the magnificent Senthil—"Sirkelu Senthil". Kachiappa Swami hails the city of Senthil on whose shores are washed the rarest gems.

Nakkirar extols it as the abode of universal renown—"ulagam Pugazh Ongu uyar vilu chiralavai". It is also known as Jayantipuram or Senthilnagar, which name connotes the victory of Muruga over the warring hordes of the titans. In modern times, it is called Tiruchendur or Sandanachalam, and is situated

in the eastern coastal belt of the Tirunelveli district, 35 miles to the east of Tirunelveli town. The holiest of holies faces the ocean and the roaring waves beat against the shores ceaselessly, reminding one of the groaning humanity who wallow in the sea of Sam-saric misery and dash against the haven of Muruga for repose and solace. The master guide of *Tirumurugarrupadai* assures the pilgrim-seeker that the moans of sufferers, be it Devas or mortals shall not go unheeded. Brahma, Rishi Suga, son of Sage Vyasa, Sage Narada, the white elephant, Indra and the nine warrior generals with their leader Veera-bahu, had made this shrine renowned by their dogged devotional worship of Muruga.

Tirucheeralavai was also the most outstanding of the fortresses (Padaividu) of Muruga, who encamped here on his final expedition to rout the Asuric leaders, Singamugasuran, Surapadman and Panugopan who were entrenched at Mahendrapura, their capital, to the south-east of Tiruchendur. The Puranic sources relate the stories of how Brahaspathi, the Guru of the Devas, did tapas here and narrated to Muruga the secrets of the Asura kingdoms and hence it came to be known as a Gurukshetra also.

Poet Nakkirar opens this canticle with a stately image of Lord Muruga riding majestically on an aerial elephant—"Vēḷammēlkondū"—swift in its speed and terrifying in its gait, hip bells redounding and flower circlets trembling, his scarred trunk heaving high, returning victoriously from the battle front. The devastating battle-field of Emakūtam and



the disrupted Asuras recede, as Muruga enters triumphantly into the sea-girt shrine of Tiruchendur.

Mounted on the elephant, wondrous is His mien and powerful are His six faces and the twelve outstretched arms bespeak His matchless strength. His invincible weapons, the mighty javelin, (Vel) that reft asunder the unconquerable hero of the Asuras, and other such deadly tools of aggression are also the insignia of the fiery Siva. His six faces dazzle brilliantly radiating light and splendour. In the minds of the devout devotees who with unfaltering devotion are intent on accomplishing their several duties, visions arise of His glorious faces transmitting rays of light (Grace). So dynamically does His immanence work that Grace flows abundantly. Each of His faces betokens each of the acts of creation, protection, destruction (Dissolution), involution (veiling) and 'Anugraha', or outflow of grace and the sixth aspect is one of communion in silence, the Pranavam Om, the primal source of wisdom. Wisdom is equated with effulgence in this Ode on Tirucheeralavai.

Poets and philosophers have given many interpretations to the six faces of Muruga. His benignity extends to the six quarters of the earth. In the human frame are six stations of wisdom, the Yogic centres drawing their life and sustenance from each of the six faces of Muruga and in ascending order, the source of power gets released and man realises his true destiny in the union with Muruga's effulgence. The six faces of Muruga are ever vigilant to carry out their assigned duties.

Emanating from His activities spring the different forms of worship, by different categories of worshippers. Muruga is the universal God to whom individual and collective worship, ritualistic and orthodox, unconventional and traditional, are all fraught with profound meaning. His light divine is so irresistible that worshippers at this shrine are moved to melting love and their prayers prove efficacious.

Muruga has the habit of coming to Alavai with the corresponding retinue and the furious elephant on which He rides with six faces and twelve hands to the accompaniment of thunder, drums and other instruments. The scene depicts the cosmic majesty and the universal activity of God Muruga.

Tiruchendur enjoys immense popularity among all classes of worshippers of Muruga as a shrine dedicated to the elements of water, and where Muruga devotees are assured of victory in their undertakings. After his stirring victory over Surapadman, Muruga returned to this place, and in the form of a young child did "Sivapuja"; he cleaned his martial Vel in the Skanda Pushkarani—a well of fresh water, so close to the sea and very near the shrine; and to this day, it is considered to be a spring, whose waters have the healing effect over all kinds of ailments. It is now called *Nālikinaru*, and never dries up even in times of the worst drought season. The inner holiest of holies has the image of Balasubrahmanya with one face and four hands, the two lower hands in Abhaya and Varada pose of granting refuge and benediction to all who come to Him, and the two upper hands

holding the "Japamala" or rosary and flowers in the act of offering.

The image of Muruga with six faces and twelve arms as delineated by Nakkirar is on the eastern section of the temple and is known as "*Arumugam*", the Tamil name for *Shanmugam*. The poet Nakkirar and following him, the poet St. Arunagiri and Kumaraguruparar have described in a graphic way, the six faces and their accomplishments:

1. One face spreads afar rays of light (of grace) and lightens the world from darkness (of ignorance).  
One right arm is raised to guard the pure seers who move in the upper regions, preserving law and rhythm in the universe.  
One left arm is poised on his left hip in repose.
2. One face lightens up with gracious Love at the devotion of His beloved devotees and confers on them boons.  
The right arm rests on His well-clad thigh.  
The left arm wields the elephant goad. He mounts on the elephant to grant favours.
3. One face watches over the Sacrificial and Jnana 'Yajna' which wise seers perform in consonance with the sacred scriptures, and enlightens their worship for a virtuous life.  
The right arm swings the Lance, while the left arm whirls the broad, bright shield, and both the arms are engaged in vigilance fine.
4. One face is that of the Supreme Teacher (Guru) who expounds the hidden meanings and instils blissful experiences that illumine the devout seekers.  
The right hand raised to the chest in 'Abhaya' pose betokens succour and refuge.  
The left hand lowered to touch the garland at the hip points to the holy Feet of Grace.
5. One face has the impress of war, and full of wrath, ready to crush the pride of foes; it yearns to celebrate the battle sacrifice.  
One arm, the right one, is raised aloft with armlet decked. The left arm rings the sweet toned bell of double peal.

6. The sixth face beams in joy at the sight of the Vedda maid, the slender and pure-hearted Valli. One arm aids the dark blue clouds to give plenty of rains. The left arm carries the flower garland for the nuptials of the celestial maids.

Muruga is *Strength*; He is *Love* and *Wisdom* and showers *Grace*. He is *Bliss*, He is at once divine and human in His *Beauty*.

Thus do the six faces, each its special role fulfil. The twelve arms too, in unison perform their due parts, and testify to the world of Devas and men that God Muruga guides them in each and every phase of their lives. The victorious return of God Muruga, speeding across the expanse of heavens to the laudable city of Ālaivai is marked by the musical sound of instruments, strong horns blowing aloud, while conches resound to the din of the drums and the peacock with the variegated plumes beckons from His victorious banner.

Adi Sri Sankaracharya has immortalised this sanctified abode of Muruga at Tiruchendur by his famous canticle called *Subrahmanya Bhujangam*, and he has avowed that it is God Muruga who bade him sing in his praise and thus get rid of his illness. Again Kumaraguruparar was born at Sri Vaikuntam and could not speak till he was five years old. His parents took him to Tiruchendur and performed penance and to the wonder of all, the child was blessed by Muruga in a dream and he sang the celebrated *Kandar Kali Venba*, a poem of profound spiritual experience. Kumaraguruparar asks for a unique favour from Muruga in this song, which is today on the lips of every devotee:

“Let all my past deeds of ill repute be wiped off;  
 My foes, my obstacles, my ailments and  
 Myriad such perilous emergencies in life  
 May they be extirpated at the sight of Thee.  
 Come Thou with thy Faces Six, carrying Vel,  
 Dispelling fear and immerse me in knowledge;  
 A virtuous life in the company of thy faithful,  
 A vision of Thy roseate Feet is all I crave for”.

—*Kali Venba*, 111, 115, 121 and 122.

Pakalikuthar, a Vaishnava poet, was cured of his chronic illness after his rendering of the poem, peculiar to Tamil Poesy called “Pillai Tamil”, or the song of the child:

“Thou art the fountain of grace,  
 Thou Supreme succour of the lost.  
 Oh! child of infinite mercy

.....

If I call on Thee ceaselessly  
 Will Thou not come, dear dear Muruga”.

—*Pillai Tamil*, 60.

St. Arunagirinathar, a great exponent on the worship of Muruga, in his garland of Tiruppugazh has immortalised the glory of Tiruchendur as a shrine specially favoured by Muruga and His devotees. He offers a thousand kisses to the Lord who had vanquished the Asuras, who dwelleth in Senthil city, in the form of a young child facing east. (*Kandaralan-karam Pugal*—106).

St. Arunagiri in Tiruppugazh (Part 1-47) interprets this abode as representing the transcendental state of Muruga. Here the soul is immersed in the

bliss of cosmic consciousness. Senthil indicates the state of refined maturity in the process of self-realisation. (Thanigai C. Pillai's Edition).

In melodious strains of sweet verse, Ramalinga Swami, a modern poet and lover of Muruga, sang many an ode of melting piety on Senthil Muruga. His infinite faith on the invincible lance (Vēl) and His peacock vehicle and cock banner is highly contagious; those who sing his *Arulpa* poems find themselves in tearful communion with Muruga—Valli's Consort.

The temple of Tirucheeralavai is described thus by many poets and sages, as the abode of fulfilment of the victorious God Muruga (Jayantipuram) Akam 2 17-21. It represents to the mystics, the inward meditation in *turiya* stage, wherein the presence of God is experienced in His Formless essence, in divine rapture.



## TIRUVAVINANKUDI (PALANI) — THE MOUNT OF MEDITATION

This canto gives a poetic description of a picturesque aerial procession of Gods and Goddesses and celestials of surpassing beauty. The Tri-unity with Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra, the Gandharvas and Gandharvinis, Indra and his retinue, the seers and rishis of great power and wisdom, the deities of the four quarters of the earth and the thirty three demi-Gods and eighteen ganas—inheritors of the spheres, upper, middle and nether—wend their way to Tiruvavinankudi, where Muruga and his consort Devayānai abide. They move from their ethereal spheres to pay their homage to Him and win his favours. They supplicate His guidance, so that they may fulfil their specialised roles in a fitting manner. They are aware of their inability to perform their assigned duties from the experience of Brahma having been deprived of his creative function by Muruga's wrath, and so they desire to be in tune with His Will. It is pivoted on the worshippers and their mode of worship of Muruga, who with His Consort (grace) is without Form and invisible. He moves by His Will and guides the actions of his worshippers.

We get a fine description of the Seers of Truth, Rishis or Yogis as they are popularly called. They are ever joyful though they practise the severest austerities. They are Yogis and at the same time Bhogis, representing their highest ideal, God Siva, both in form and formlessness. They have no likes and dislikes, and are ever perfectly balanced in mind. They possess the mastery of all knowledge and articulate Truth.

In the procession, precedence is given to the Seers (Munis) who go in front, the Gandharvas playing their instruments follow with their wives, then step up Mal Siva and Indra and the Gods look on as He moves to Avinankudi with his consort. He and His Arul-Sakti are without form in this shrine. In Tirup-parankunram, he is with and without form and in Tirucheeralavai, he is with form; while in Tiruverakam, He moves through the potency of the Mantras, sacred formula and secret invocation.

This canto (lines 126-176) deals with the high philosophic and ritualistic worship of God Muruga by the *Antanar*, the enlightened Seers, who had vowed celibacy and practised great austerities. "In beauty, He dwelleth with the Lady of flawless purity and devotion in Avinankudi". Thus He is seen and sought by Gods, seers and celestials for boons to help them to fulfil their great duties. The Three Gods of the Tri-unity accompanied by thrice thirty wise ones who appear different when differentiated, but in themselves have no difference, move in the starry heavens and their pace is as of the wind risen on the sea, whose might is as of the wind-swept fire and

whose voice is as the thunder. They move in such stately array to Tiruvavinankudi, the modern hill of Palani, on a deputation to plead for the mitigation of Brahma's punishment.

The imprisonment of Brahma, the four-faced God, represents the restraint of the mind with four substrata under the supreme control of divine knowledge.

Muruga punished even the deities if they were possessed by ego, and He showed His grace towards the saints and His foster mothers who had no ego in them. He protects the sages from the excessive warmth of the sun. Muruga is here held up as the Lord of the Cosmos including the sun, the moon, and the stars of the sky, as portrayed by Nakkirar.

In Tiruvavinankudi, Muruga is celebrated as the God of Gods and as the Creator of the Universe who made Brahma suffer on account of his ego and ignorance. A galaxy of Gods are described as awaiting the grace of God Muruga, so that Kumara can restore the status of Brahma.

Avinankudi was the capital of the historic chieftains who belonged to Aviyar clan. They were devotees of God Muruga. Avinankudi was otherwise called Potini. Potini is referred to as a place having a beautiful big temple.

A poet in *Purananuru* is called as Aviyar; perhaps he belonged to Avinankudi or Aviyar clan. This proves that Avinankudi was a centre of royal signi-

ficance as well as a temple of learning with its presiding deity as God Muruga even in the classical age.

The land (the Konkunad) of Pekan, the renowned philanthropist of the Sangam age is celebrated as the land of hills with high peaks guarded by the God of supreme power. Here the reference clearly is to the present temple of Palani.

It was already noted that God Muruga was the guardian deity of seasonal rains. In this context, it was inferred that the dance of peacocks was considered as a divine symptom of the God's grace and his blessings for immediate rain. So it is likely that Pekan discovered the grace of God in the dance of the peacocks and made instantaneously the valuable gift to the bird. He was aware of the tradition that peacocks were moved into rapturous dance, while they were possessed by the spirit of God. Awareness that every being is possessed by God-consciousness, makes the religious experience of the Hindu, mean intensely and mean significantly well. The line in *Sirupānarrupadai* celebrating Pekan as a magnanimous lover and benevolent hero, is capable of varied suggestion to his heroism as well as to his pious devotion to the mighty God of the Potini Hills which were situated in his land.

The clan of Aviyar worshipped in the temple of Palani hills which was endowed with great wealth, by the devotees. This temple of Muruga was referred to as Potini in the Sangam poems. (J. N. Soma-sundaram Pillai on Palani).

## TIRUVERAKAM—THE ABODE OF THE KUMARA-GURU

Tiruverakam Ode (lines 177-188) forms the fourth in the series of Padaividu (encampments) described by St. Nakkirar. It is the shortest ode. Here the brahmins, twice-born, (Irupirappālar) well versed in the sacred scriptures offering fragrant flowers, sing and glorify Him and so He loves to dwell at Erakam too. This is the whole import of this lyric.

The ritual worship of Muruga according to the codes of the various scriptures is performed by the community of vedic scholars known as the twice-born or the brahmins. The brahmin devotees are said to be well-disciplined in their six-fold functions such as learning, teaching, performance of sacrificial fires, organising performance of sacrificial fires, offering charity and receiving charity (*Tolkappiam*: Purattinai 16).

There is a tradition according to the scholars in the system of Sanskrit grammar, which celebrate God Muruga, otherwise known as Kumara, as the author of Vyakarnam which is named after Him as *Kaumara Vyakarnam*. So the brahmins who were ardent students of Vyakarnam worshipped Muruga who was

the eternal Guru and source of their scriptures in the form of the Vedas and the Vyakarnas.

The *antanars* are described as the twice-born and twice-named. They are said to be re-born after the ceremony of the wearing of the sacred thread. They are twice-named since they bear the aspects of two parentages, one by the father and the other by the mother. They are celebrated for their unique life of sympathy and service in the path of righteousness. Muruga is celebrated as the guardian deity of righteousness and so he is worshipped by the *antanars*. (*Paripadal* 14: 27-28).

### *Ritual Worship*

The worship of God Muruga by the brahmins (known as *antanars*) was in various forms. Popular among them was the worship by means of *Vēlvi* or the sacrificial fires. God was supposed to be the form of light and fire and sacred things were put into fire in the belief that they were accepted by God. In the legend on the birth of Muruga, it is represented that He was the embodiment of Siva and was in the form of divine sparks of fire carried by Agni. The sacrificial fires indicate the aspect of Agni who was the divine carrier of Muruga during His birth. The scholars of the Upanishads are of the opinion that the invocatory singing of the Vedic Deity, 'Subrahmanyam, Subrahmanyam, Subrahmanyam,' thrice before the beginning of the sacrificial rituals indicates the association of Skanda, otherwise called Subrahmanyam, with the Vedic fires. The sacred fire, according to the Vedas, is identified with Siva. Muruga



was the embodiment of the spirit of Siva and so was the protector of the sacred fire.

The identification of Subrahmanya with Muruga is found established in the age of Nakkirar. *Tirumurugarrupadai* while describing the functions of the six faces of Muruga, clearly indicates that one face vigilantly guards the sacrificial fires performed by the *antanars* according to the stipulated canons of the Vedic hymns (T.M.G. 95-96). In another context the same poem states that Muruga is the wealth of the *antanars* (T.M.G. 263). In Tiruverakam, He is exclusively worshipped by the Brahmacharyas strictly disciplined in the learning of Vedas, according to their noble parentage.

The *antanars* are found extremely pious chanting the holy six letters in gentle voice, along with the offerings of fragrant flowers. The sanctity of mantra worship necessitated such a purity of soul and body that they worshipped God Muruga dressed in wet garments (T.M.G. 184). The life of the brahmin is divided into four parts and for a quarter of his life, he becomes an ardent student of the Vedas living with a teacher (T.M.G. 179-180).

The ancient Kings patronised the cult of worship of the sacrificial fires performed by the brahmins, since the sacrificial fires were believed to be the most delightful offerings to gods and brought seasonal rains to the land and saved the country from disasters and external dangers in the form of wars. That the ancient Pandya and Chola Kings were great patrons of this cult is found from their surnames. The brahmins were considered the guardians of the wel-

fare of the community as a whole. So it is evident that sacrificial fires were performed by the brahmins for individual salvation, as well as for the welfare of the land. Muruga was recognised as the guardian deity of the cult of sacrificial fires. In the sacrificial feast, the God and the human family proclaimed and renewed their unity with each other.

Nakkirar explains the subtle philosophy of worship underlying the concept of God. Purity of heart and purity of body were considered the preliminary conditions. As a next step the chanting of the holy mantra of six letters keeps up the warmth of their heart which destroys all dirt and purifies the heart making it the abode of His grace. The chanting of holy mantra is strictly limited to be pronounced as gently as possible, since the aim is to kindle the inward flame of devotion and help in the concentration of the individual.

A fusion of the vedic worship with the ritual worship is found in *Tirumurugarrupadai* and *Pari-padal*. *Antanars* used to sit in long meditation chanting their ancient mantras resting on the support of a triple-headed staff (*Tirusul*). The significance of meditation and chanting the holy six letters of Muruga is referred to in *Tirumurugarrupadai*. This chanting of the mystic letters of spiritual potency is the propelling force of an inward spiritual pilgrimage in the form of an introspective meditation. The focal point of meditation is said to undergo a shifting process from the lower centres or *ādhara*s to the highest centre, passing through six stages. These six stages can be taken to be symbolically representing the six abodes of Muruga in *Tirumurugarrupadai*.

The spiritually attuned souls attain a dynamic power in their words. The mystic words uttered under the dictates of the cosmic consciousness attain a magnetic potency of expression and their utterance is called mantras. According to Nakkirar, the mantra form of letters that kindles the divine concentration is counted as six and is called *Saravanabava* and termed also as *Sadaksharam* in Sanskrit. The knowledge of these six letters is handed over to the succeeding generation in the process of spiritual initiation by a suitable preceptor to a suitable disciple. They are chanted mentally and never chanted aloud.

In this way, Nakkirar delineates the traditional worship of chanting the holy letters that embody the divine grace of Muruga during the inward meditation, which is attuned by the guidance of the Guru after a spiritual initiation. Here also, Muruga becomes the source of Knowledge which can be attained by meditation. The concept of Muruga in mantra-form known as six letters *Sa ra va na ba va* is interpreted by the commentator Naccinarkkiniyar as *Namo Kumarāye*. In the holy six letters, the first two letters are the *Saktibijas*, the middle two are the *Kumarabijas* and the last two are the *Sivabijas*. (*Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. IV, p. 312). It further implies according to Sanskrit script 'Sara', that He is the source of the twenty-five eternal *tattwas*.

Thus Muruga abides in Tiruverakam as the Kumara-Guru, the preceptor of the twice-born *antanars* who worship Him by the incantation of His letters six—*Sa ra va na ba va*.

## KUNRUTORADAL—THE SPORT ON THE HILLS

In this ode (lines 190-217), Muruga is described as the God who loves to sport on the hills. This tradition is further confirmed in the hymns of St. Arunagiri in his Tirupugazh. (Vol. I, 233). This section gives us a graphic picture of the rites and ceremonies of the hill tribes; there is a vivid description of the Kurava dances and the ceremonies they enact. "While the hill tribes drink and dance, the *Ceyon*, the Red one, has the permanent habit of dancing with the maids on all the hill fronts". The hill-folk were hunters and they conceived their God as the source of heroism and energy. Temples were erected on the top of hills to worship Him in the form of a Warrior-God.

*Dance and music as forms of worship of the hill tribes and forest rangers:*

The worship of Muruga takes the form of a dance known as *veriyadal* in the hilly and forest regions. These high-landers celebrated God Muruga as their guardian deity and believed that the welfare of their tribe was His concern. If any young maid fell ill and became moody, it was the custom to propitiate God Muruga by means of group dances

and music. Whenever diseases or severe famine struck their land due to scarcity of water, the hill-folk started their community-worship of dance and music to get relief from their calamities by the grace of their guardian deity, God Muruga.

The tribal dance was performed in praise of God Muruga by these primitive folks, sometimes to ward off the calamities anticipated through ill omens and their dance was known as *veriyāttu* and when it was intended for the prosperity and preservation of the peace of the tribe, it was called as *kuravaikūttu*. (Kurincei Pattu 208-210).

This dance was indulged in by a mixed group of men and women, most probably pairs of husband and wife. The small drum made of deer skin was beaten as an accompaniment. The dancers were intoxicated by drinking matured honey and the boisterous noise of their dance and music resounded all over the hills. The dancing was resorted to on the plains between high peaks of the hills. *Verikkūttu* is a dance of rapture occasioned by a trance into which the devotees of Muruga were thrown. The main devotee with spear in his hands, dressed in red garments, adorning himself with red garlands and paste of red sandal, will dance to the tune of *tontakapparai*. This dance is associated with the *Vinodakkūttu* as classified by Adiyarkkunallār. A maiden of the hill will dance dressing herself in the form of Valli and it was called *Vallikkuttu* (Naṭṭrinai—31).

The place of worship was known as *verikkalam* situated for the time being within the compass of

the house. This worship was intended for the welfare of the family and was therefore performed in the house. The shrine situated in the meeting places of the villages was intended for the worship of the community of the village.

The *verikkalam* or the place of worship by *veriyādal* was decorated with red flowers since Muruga took delight in red flowers. The *kāntal* was chosen for decoration of the worship-ground, since it was delightfully red with petals like flames of fires. The place of *veriyādal* was renewed by spreading soft white sand. *Kalanku* was thrown and counted on the renewed sand. Thus the place of divining truths was kept pure and neat, so that the divine *kalanku* might not lose its divine power due to the impurity of the place. (Kurunthokai 360, 362).

Sometimes a kadamba tree is decorated with creepers and garlands of flowers. Various well-tuned musical instruments are played on. The tune favourite to God Muruga is chosen for the occasion to be played on the instruments. In such places of worship the devotees are possessed by the God and start moving their bodies in raptures and rhythmic dance. The religion of the ancient Tamils had its source of life in their aesthetic spirit as evidenced in their dances and music associated with their religious cults. (Adinguru Nooru 245).

Music develops the divine ecstasy in the devotees. The music, dance and worship are closely inter-related in the cult of Muruga. In the present day, the dance with a *Kāvadi* on the shoulders of the de-



votes has gained enormous popularity in the temples of God Muruga, like Palani and Kathirgaman. The origin of this dance must probably be the *veriyādal* of Velan who is said to have danced with a staff and an idol in his hand (Kurunthokai 214). It is enough to say that the rapture of rhythmic movement is kindled during intense devotion to God. The divine delight is accentuated in the bearers of *Kāvadi*. *Kāvadi* dance and *Kavadichindu* are the current popular features inherited from the past in the cult of Muruga worship today.

According to the point of view of mystic interpreters, the *Kāvadi* pole possesses an esoteric significance. In *Kundalini* yoga, it represents the spinal column on one end of which is the pericarp of the lotus called *Kulasahasra Kamala* and on the other that of another lotus called *Kulasahasra Kamala*. The tying of the sacred thread of protection on ceremonial days of worship is a custom that is continued even today. This symbolises the determination and steadfast perseverance of the devotee in conducting the ceremonials. The priestess by tying a red thread on her wrist indicated that she had completely dedicated herself to the service of God and was prepared to face any ordeals.

In the worship of the hill-landers, a sense of rhythm and attunement is indicated in the ceremonials. Since Muruga is red-hued, the sacred thread red in colour, is selected for the worship.

The things chosen for offering to Muruga are mentioned in *Tirumurugarrupadai* and *Paripadal*.

White fried rice was spread before the image of His cock-banner. White rice mixed with ram's blood was thrown in different corners of the place of worship. Fresh turmeric mixed with sweet scented sandal paste is sprinkled all over the place where the presence of God is invoked. The purification of the individual as well as the purification of the place of worship is considered essential. The place of worship is colourfully decorated. Red garlands of *oleander* (Alari) are hung around the place of worship with a sense of symmetry in the length and the colour of the garlands. Here also the sense of harmony of the devotees is observed. Red flowers are chosen since Muruga is the red-hued God. (*Silappadigaram*, p. 117 of Dikshitar's translation).

The closing lines of this ode on the sport of God Muruga in the hilly regions are some of the most exquisite lines of poetry. Euphony and rhythm convey the sense of youthful communion. The crimson-hued Velan, in whom the power of Muruga is displayed, adorns himself with cool shoots that quiver on his ears. He dons a girdle and his anklets tinkle while the Vetchi blooms play on his crown. He plays on the flute, blows the horn and flutters a fine cock flag, riding on a peacock. His trailing raiment floats in the air as he dances, swinging his lance upon the hills with tender damsels joining him as gentle as a flock of deer. There is exuberance, vigour, intense devotion and comradeship in this form of worship by the unsophisticated people of the hilly regions. Their hardy life has not made them hard hearted, and they pray that their dense hearts as hard as the granite rocks should melt at the touch of Velan's Grace. Thus

by their fervent piety, untutored in the Vedic forms of worship, they wrest Muruga's special attributes of grace. That is the underlying significance of the last line in this ode:

“Kunruthōradalum Ninratan Puṇpē”.

## PAZHAMUTHIRCHOLAI—THE GROVE OF GRACE

*Pazhamuthircholai*, the temple of Muruga celebrated in *Tirumurugarrupadai* is identified with *Tirumaliruncholai* which is regarded by most scholars as the present *Alagarmalai* near Madurai. Silappadigaram describes the *Cilambaru* of the temple, as the waterfall of great force. The dynamic force of the waterfall is depicted by Nakkirar in lines 296-317, when describing the beauteous charms of *Pazhamuthircholai*. *Tirumalirunkunram* or *Tirumaliruncholai* were the names cherished by the Vaishnava devotees. *Cholaimalai* or *Pazhamuthircholai* were the names celebrated by devotees of Muruga.

St. Arunagiri celebrated the hill in many of his hymns as a favourite abode of Muruga. In the hymn dedicated to *Tirumalincholaimalai*, *Tirumangaialwar* refers to Muruga as also *Perialwar*. *Alagar Kalanbakam* clearly denotes that it was the abode of both the gods, *Mēyon* and *Cēyon*. It is quite probable that this was the abode of *Tirumal* as well as the temple of Muruga in Nakkirar's time. In this Canto, we find a dual movement in thought and expression, and poetic excellence is at a crescendo. The paeans of praise by man and nature excel the best natural poetry of the western poets.

Muruga is the exalted theme. The *quest* of the seeker, the pilgrim of eternity, led by his venerable guide-guru, ends in a grand conquest. At the journey's end, having made his humble obeisance at the pre-eminent sacred abodes of Muruga, he is rewarded in the most magnanimous manner with a vision of Muruga in His radiant young form. It synchronises with the pilgrim's *adoration* in a totally inadequate fashion, for so unspeakable and immeasurable is the glory of Muruga. This is followed by the majestic visible *Praise of Nature* in her all-embracing form. In the microcosm and the macrocosm, the grace of Muruga pervades. It is a play of opposites.

The mystic rituals of Velan and his group are contrasted with the heart's prayer of the lone pilgrim who has stumbled into the festive merriment, seeking Muruga's grace. The hill tribes invoke Him as their companion and guardian in an atmosphere of exuberance, but the guide and the suppliant approach Muruga with reverence and extol His divine glory. He sports with the rustic peasants and maids who believe that Velan, the high priest, is none other than Muruga, and indeed the expectation of their faith is rewarded, for the *veriyadal* dance bestows prosperity on their clan. Equally rewarded is the poet and his sishya who behold His noble manifestation as a Jnana-Guru and get His assurance of grace; whatever the mode of worship, Muruga will respond.

The *stage of Nature* vibrates with His mighty music. The forest, hills and dales, townships and villages, crossroads and shady trees wherever man moves and has his being, there *He* has His abode.

He will meet us wherever we desire to meet Him. He abides in elevated temples as well as in sequestered nooks and unfrequented peaks—the *object* of universal adoration, the sovereign God—who seeks out His *subjects*, devas, men, bhutas, demons and titans even as they arise to seek Him by prayer or praise, rituals or sacrifices in temples or at *veriyadal* dances. He will surely grant unto them eternal felicity and torrential grace.

This is the quintessence of the song of Pazhamuthircholai, and the closing picture of the mountain torrent sweeping down the heights bring before our mental vision, the deluge of His overwhelming grace. Elements of fear and terror, objects with ripeness of maturity and feebleness of immaturity, bird, beast and reptiles—all submit to His sway and are subdued in love, even as did Surapadman, the king of Asuras. The certitude of Murugan's Grace and the testament of man's victory of *Faith*, are revealed in the final presentation of the mountain torrent. Muruga's assurance of grace stirs the dumb chords of the still sad music of humanity, then and now.

“Fear thee not—  
Thy word and silence,  
I *know*—Be thou exalted in this world  
Girt by the dark furious oceans”.

T.M.G. 291.



## SYNTHESIS OF MURUGA SADHANA IN TIRUMURUGARRUPADAI

The poet has given us a magnificent concept of Muruga, where gods and goddesses and celestial beings mingle with the earthly inhabitants and the spirits and devils of the under world, vying with one another to sing and dance in jubilant adoration. He is a God of Love—*Cevvēl*, and God of War—*Kandavēl*. He is a Bhogi and a Yogi. He is a Child of wisdom and a Guru of profound contemplation. Beauty and ugliness, light and darkness, penance and plenitude, the vista vision of nature in all her glory as well as the kaleidoscopic interplay of the human powers, the beautiful damsels and ugly wenches, in fact, an amazing spectacle of opposites unfolds before our eyes, making us gaze from heaven to earth, from the summit to the abyss in an alternating rhythm of poetic balance and religious harmony.

The glow of the Divine Child—*Tiruttagu sey*—and the grace of the *Malai-Kilavone*, and the tuneful worship of the devas and gandharvas, blend with that of the finite devotion—many-faced—of the diverse votaries who worship Muruga. Some are cultured and

in felicity ethereal, they sing and dance. They crown the Beloved with senkānthal. Some are crude and exotic with their terrific peals of gusto; and the primitive aborigines measure their zeal by the bloody feats to celebrate His victory. The sages and seers resort to the mystic formula—the word that was God—and the elite worship Him with vedic chants and agamic rituals.

In the last Ode, Muruga is conceived as the highest and the ultimate goal of life. The devotees had the freedom to worship their favourite deities in different environments. The broad banyan tree, the kadamba tree of fresh blossoms and the delta-regions of rivers were some of the ideal places for their worship. The cult of a universal God manifesting in the natural centres of water fronts and hill tops gained popularity and recognition in the Tamil land. "Thou art everywhere under the shade of the banyan and the kadamba trees, and the regions of deltas of rivers". (Paripadal).

Muruga is the Supreme God of *antanars*—wise ones—as well as of the untutored tribes of the hills. Those who are cruel hearted, those who lose their fame by unrighteous conduct, those who err in their austere life of penance and those who reveal their ignorance by denying the truth of re-births and karma do not enjoy the grace of Muruga.

*Tirumurugarrupadai* refers to the two-fold aspects of God Muruga—his righteous grace and his indignant grace (*arakkarunai* and *marakkarunai*). He

loves the virtuous devotees and destroys the unrighteous enemies. Both the aspects of Muruga lead to the welfare of the world and the salvation of the souls from the clutches of evil.

Muruga is the eternal patron who awards this perpetual reward. Here *Paripadal* as well as *Tirumurugarrupadai* celebrate the immortal gains of spiritual values in preference to the material progress, and glorify the spiritual rewards ultimately to be obtained from Muruga. Devotion to God as testified by the ancient poets, aims at material prosperity as well as spiritual felicity.

*Tirumurugarrupadai* points out that one of the twelve arms of God Muruga is stretched across the sky to prevent the blazing rays of the sun from affecting the sages with excessive heat. While the sages protect the world, God Muruga protects the sages! Here Muruga is found worshipped as the God of the wise seers and sages, who are the guardians of the welfare of the Universe.

That the seers and sages were the most favourite devotees of Muruga is established in *Tirumurugarrupadai*. A galaxy of heavenly deities marches towards Āvinankudi, seeking the mercy of Muruga to get Brahma released from imprisonment. The large deputation of the deities is headed by the seers and saints and after them only follow the devas. This explains the greatness of the sages and their interest in protecting the universal welfare. It was believed that their very appearance will appease the wrath of Muruga. Their outward pilgrimage marks also an inward pil-

grimace attained by a serene life freed from the wickedness of the senses. So their radiant and divine personality is the index of their purity.

According to St. Arunagiri, the moment a devotee tasted the nectar of His grace, so kindled was he by Muruga's love, that sugarcane even had no sweetness for him and honey tasted sour. Immersed in the divine rapture of yogic meditation, the sages could live without food for long periods, and great were their powers of action.

In Tirucheeralavai and Tiruverakam, we get the concept of Muruga as the eternal Guru. One of His six faces is to dispel the ignorance and illuminate the mysterious chamber of truth which remains inexplicable to mortal teachers. So, the Seers by their consistent discipline and self-control over their sensual attractions and instinctive cravings of the human body, make themselves the worthy votaries of Muruga by drawing inspiration from Him who is the eternal guru. Through this discipline of culture, the divine wisdom comes down to the mortals through a long geneology of saints and seers who are the transmitters of eternal wisdom from the eternal Guru Muruga, who is the source of all knowledge.

By constant meditation on the Absolute, the sages become spiritually mighty and capable of overcoming the forces of Karma and so they are called 'Munivar'. In their constant meditation, they are spiritually charged from the eternal energy of the cosmic powerhouse which is Muruga. The cosmic life force is always running in their life-wires and so they are able to crush the forces of evil.

Along with the lines of Tirumular's hymn, the immortal Alankara of Saint Arunagiri proclaims the glory of Muruga as an eternal source of cosmic power which could be harnessed in human life to subdue the force of destiny (Kandar Alankaram, 40). Saint Arunagiri, the monarch among the devotees of Muruga, majestically proclaims in his *Kandar Alankaram*: "Letters written on my head by the hand of the God of fate were completely erased by the touch of the feet of Muruga instantaneously; at that moment I bowed down my head at his lotus-feet in total self-surrender".

From these references, it is to be concluded that Muruga is a divine Guru to those who are immersed in His grace by their inward meditation, and a disciplined life of austere vows and penances. The ancient abode of Tiruvavinankudi is otherwise known as *Cittanvālvu*. The name Palani is referred to as *Potini* in the Sangam poems. It is also called *Cittanvālvu*, because God Muruga manifested in the hill shrine of Palani in the form of a *Sittar* or a realised Seer and as the Teacher of teachers. In this abode He is an example of an ascetic, teaching the mortals that real wisdom shines in him who is detached from all sensual cravings. Hence, the seers are given the first place in the line of devotees who proceed to invoke His grace at Tiruverakam.

Besides the priests and priestesses of the hill-land who invoke Muruga by their dances and musical invocation, Kuliyars who are the minions or priests of Muruga also offer their worship. They entreat the grace of Muruga on behalf of the devotees who are

found well-matured in their spiritual discipline. Here the importance of the Guru or the spiritual preceptor in the form of Kuliyar is suggested by Nakkirar. The invocation of the devotee and the appearance of the Kuliars are dramatically synchronised by Nakkirar.

The Kuliars of Pazhamuthircholai are taken to mean the tender-hearted attendants and spiritual mediators in the temple of Muruga. In Nakkirar's *Tirumurugarrupadai*, the words of these Kuliars entreating Muruga on behalf of the devotees indicate their ripeness and spiritual attunement. The Kuliars say: "This minstrel desires thy grace; he is ripe in his spiritual knowledge; he has realised Thy immortal glory; and so his desire for the award of Thy grace is sincere". T.M.G. 283-285.

The panoramic vista of Muruga dwindles in breadth from the aerial gods, titans, seers, demons, to the hill tribes and Kuravai maids and finally settles on the earnest seeker after Muruga. The diminuendo is a crescendo in the intensity of the approach to Muruga as we reach the climax of the whole poem, when the seeker "Nayantön" sees the gracious presence of Muruga. He who is also known as *Guha* plays his drama in the cosmic stage, as well as in the inmost cave of the devotee's heart. Professor Carl A. Keller rightly alludes to this central pivot of the whole poem as the grand finale, when the seeker not only hears His redeeming voice, but also sees His universal Teacher, face to face. "His fiery form instantly He conceals to one of genial youth and utters words of love". T.M.G. 290-291.



The poem is significantly a drama in that there is perpetual movement from the opening line to the closing line. The sun moves round the mount; the girls dance round the pole; the festive crowd moves on to Tirupparankunram; the demons leap in glee; the processional march glides through the heavens; Muruga rides on his swift elephant; the waves dash against the shore; Velan skips around with his lance holding a team of dancers; from abode to abode, the *nayanton*, or the pilgrim-seeker moves from one abode to the other, till finally he comes to the festive sanctum where Muruga holds His court of revels. Here the vibration of music and dance halts for a still second when the Kuliars intercede on his behalf with their Master, and the gracious Muruga grants the peerless award—the *paricil* of His Gracious Feet T.M.G. 295.

He grants His *Visvarupa Darshan* to his devotee after he has surrendered everything at His Feet. In the universe, good and evil are like light and darkness chasing each other in endless succession. Muruga also manifests His terrible and gentle aspects, His form of genial radiance and His form of fiery heroic valour, in alternating rhythm, and this in turn is reflected in the world of nature and man. Nakkirar's experience of crisis is reflected in the dance of the weird devils *Peymahalir*, and the deputation of the heavenly gods, only to be followed by the experience of fulfilment in the celestial dance of the *kurava* (nymphs) *mahalir*, and the procession of seers or *munivar* and the incantation of the devoted aspirant or *nayanton*, all of whom capture His true glory.

The euphony and resonance of diction quicken the intensity of movement and enhance the splendour of Muruga, the young and yet so ancient God of dynamic valour, and God of love and beauty. All things great and small, all feelings and actions of the actors in this drama are intimately related to Muruga, who is the centrifugal point of radiation. We arise from a reading of the poem with the prayer to Muruga to make this world neither a blot nor blank; but to make it mean intensely and mean well.

## MURUGA-KUMARA AS REVEALED IN THE VEDAS AND UPANISHADS

The cult of Muruga-Kumara seems to have had its beginning even before the Vedic Age. "The myths connected with Skanda-Muruga are of no age. Whatever is the age when the collection of the Ṛig-Veda Samhita was finished, it was before that age that the conviction had been formed that there is but One, One Being—*Tat Ekam*—neither male nor female, a Being raised high above all the conditions and limitations of personality and of human nature, and nevertheless the Being that was really meant by all such names as Indra, Agni, Prajapati, lord of creatures and Rudra."<sup>1</sup> In the *Ekāgni Kānda* of the *Ṛig-Veda* occurs the following *Gāyatrī* verse about *Sadasaspati*:

*Sadasaspatim Adbhutam  
Priyam Indrasya Kāmyam  
Sanim medhām ayāsisam.*

(Verse 6, *Ṛig-Veda* I.18).

"I approach the wonderful Lord of the sacrificial hall who is the giver of wisdom and who is dear and desirable to Indra."

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1. Science of Mythology, p. 72.

Sadasaspati is taken to be Agni, the Lord of the sacrificial Hall, who is dear to Indra, because the Soma drink wished for by Indra is Agni's gift. Agni is addressed in R̥ig-Veda V.23.2 as *Tvam hi satyo adbhutah*—"Thou art indeed Truth wonderful." Again, in R̥ig-Veda 1.40.2 Brahmanaspati is called '*Sahasasputra*,' son of valour. Brahmanaspati, Lord of words and prayers and called also as Bṛhaspati, is one of the aspects of Agni.

Skanda or Kumāra is blended of aspects of R̥ig-Vedic Soma, Agni, Indra, Varuna, Bṛhaspati and Hiranyagarbha. "Kumara is a R̥ig-Vedic divinity affirming the immensity and the variety of Reality", says T.G. Aravamudhan in a learned note on Skanda.\* The identity of Kumāra with the Agni-Soma of the Vedic period has been put forward by western Indological scholars like Professor Max Muller and Monsieur A. Barth. Rudra is identified in the Vedic hymns with Agni. This syncretism probably gave rise to different legends relating to the birth of Skanda, though in reality, they point to one and the same source.

The Vedic verse quoted above from R̥ig-Veda I.18 on Sadasaspati is one of the main vedic texts upon which the epic stories on the birth of Kumara seem to be based. Indra is depicted to be the most valourous God of the R̥ig-Veda and in one of the martial hymns there is the verse:

"Indra is the leader of the Gods—

Let Bṛhaspati, Dakshina, Yajna (Sacrifice)

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\* Tassi, Vol. VII, page 129.

Soma go forward and let the Maruts (Devas)  
Go in the van of the victorious Devasenas".

X.103, 8.

Even in the Upanishads, Indra is the supreme deity, but in the subsequent period, he became one of the Loka-pālas—the king of the Loka called Devaloka with Bṛhaspati as his priest. The Maruts are the powers of righteousness and knowledge. They war against the powers of darkness and evil. Devas and Asuras represent the powers of light and darkness and are the personified good and bad inclinations of man, and the riddles arising from the senses. Many a puranic character who is outwardly a demon conquering the Devas is inwardly a good being subduing the senses. Of the sacrificial deities, Agni is the most important as being the flag of sacrifice. "He is *Rakshoka*, killer of the Rakshas who represent falsehood and evil". (Rig-Veda X.87). In his aspect as Rudra, he is known in Rig-Veda VII.46, as "the warrior having a firm bow and discharging swift flying arrows." This aspect of him is emphasised in the Yajur Veda (Taittireya Samhita IV.5). He is called here 'Senanya', the General. (Rig-Veda I.189.1).

It is true that in the Rig-Veda, Indra is the most heroic God, but in I.18.6, it is stated that Agni Sadasapati is Kāmya even to Indra, and that he is *adbhuta*, prodigious. It clearly signifies that Indra and the Devas were in need of that aspect of Agni, according to which he is 'Sahasasputra', son of valour, and the most powerful *Senanya*, leading the army of the Gods to victory in the path of righteousness, as his

identity with Brahmanaspati, Lord of prayer and knowledge, well befits him to do. (Rig-Veda 8.73.8).

Indra is represented in many puranic stories as the Lord of the senses, which when religiously trained to find in everything the hidden child Antaryāmi whose symbol is Agni, must have Agni the Fire of Knowledge as their General, in order to put down the Dānavas, which are the dark passions. He is called *Sahasrajit*—conqueror of thousands.<sup>1</sup> Thus in the Rig-Veda, Agni's connection with war is mentioned several times. (Rig-Veda 8.43.21; 6.8.5; and 4.4.4).

Kumāra is termed in the Atharva Veda as *Agni-bhūh*, son of Agni, and is pictured as confounding the foes. A.V.6.67.2. In the *Satapatha Brahmana*<sup>2</sup> he is depicted as the son of Rudra or the ninth form of Agni or Rudra. There is no contradiction here, as Rudra is but one aspect of Agni as stated in the earliest Vedic literature. The ninth aspect of Rudra which is all-pervading and which enters into all forms itself without form, is Kumāra, the child *Antaryami*. This child is identical with *Hiranyagarbha*; He and His father are identical.<sup>3</sup>

In the Aryan pantheon, Kumara is spoken of as Skanda, Karttikeya or Subrahmanya. In Rig-Veda the name *Subrahmanyom* occurs thrice as an invocation and signifies the manifestation of *Brahman*. The chanting of *Subrahmanyom* thrice before the beginning of the sacrificial rituals in the Vedic Age indi-

1. Macdonell, 'Vedic Mythology', p. 60, 98.

2. Kanda 5, Adhyaya 1, Brahmana 13, Verse 18.

3. Ananda Cumaraswamy—Vedic knowledge.



cates the association of Skanda, otherwise called Subrahmanya, with the Vedic fires. The sacred fire is identified with Rudra or Siva. In Chandogya Upanishad, a pre-Buddhist work, Sage Narada having lost his peace of mind approaches Sage Sanatkumara and inquires of him the way to peace. He taught him how to overcome ignorance and attain wisdom. "The way that leads to light or wisdom points to Skanda." (Chandogya. 7.26.2).

*tasmai mrditakasayaya tamasaḥ param darshayati*  
*bhagavan Sanatkumārah tam skanda ityācak-  
 syate.*

Here Sanatkumara is identified with Skanda.<sup>1</sup> In his treatise on Murugan, K.A. Nilakanta Sastri infers that the sources in Sanskrit are somewhat shrouded in antiquity. "The true beginnings are hidden and we start somewhere in the middle." The first Anuvāka of the tenth prapāthaka of the Taittiriya Āraṇyaka, where occurs the Gayatri mantras of Parasa-Mahasena-Shanmukha, contains the mantras of several deities—Rudra, Nandi, Danti, Shanmukha, Garuda, Brahmā, Vishnu, Āditya, Durgā and Agni. The gāyatrī of Shanmukha reads:

*tat purusāya Vidmahē maha senāya dhīmahi*  
*tannah Shanmukhah pracōdayat.*

Both these texts are pre-Buddhist in date. The description of Skanda found in the Skanda yāga<sup>2</sup> which is included in the Parisistas of the Atharva Veda

1. Kane, History of Dharma Sastra, Vol. V, p. 581.

2. Parisistas of the Atharva Veda edited by Bolling and Negelein (1909) Page 128-134.

is interesting. Here, he is associated with the peacock—'*yam vahanti mayurah*' 2.3. Siva, Agni and the Kṛttikas are all described as his parents—5.1.

*Agneyam Kṛttikaputram Aindraṃ kecid adhiyate  
Ke cit Pasupatam Raudraṃ yo si so si namó stute*  
6.4.

"Some read (son) of Agni, some of Kṛttikas (son) of Indra, some (son) of Pasupati, of Rudra, who thou art, art thou, reverence be to Thee". Although he is constantly referred as *Dhūrta* (rogue) he is depicted as a beneficent and boon-granting deity. A.V. Parisistas. Skanda yāga 5.2.3.<sup>1</sup>

In the period of the Vedānga literature, Skanda-Karttikeya appears as one of the benevolent deities. This Sūtra literature was composed between 600 B.C. and 200 B.C.<sup>2</sup> In the Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra, we find the following names of the deity—Skanda, Sanatkumara, Visakha, Śaṇmukha, Mahāsenā and Subrahmanya. This work according to Macdonnell<sup>3</sup> was composed before the Apastamba Dharma Sūtra which is assigned by Buhler to about 400 B.C. It is revealing that the name *Subrahmanya* is also a popular name of the God in southern India. The testimony of this work shows that the worship of this God was practised before 400 B.C.

Here we find the daily libations of a householder and in this mantra is included the identification of Sanatkumara with Skanda, in consonance with the

1. Goodwin's translation.

2. Macdonnell, A history of Sanskrit literature, p. 206.

3. Macdonnell, A history of Sanskrit literature, pp. 218-219.

Chandogya Upanishad text already quoted, and his connection with penance, all-knowing and possessed of all knowledge become established.

*Om sanatkumāram tarpayāmi: Skandam tarpayāmi:*

*Indram tarpayāmi: Sasthim tarpayāmi:*

*Shanmukham tarpayāmi: Visākham tarpayāmi:*

*Jayamtam tarpayāmi:*

*Mahāsenam tarpayāmi: Skandaparsadamam tarpayāmi*

This evidence may well point to the fact that by this period of time, Skanda was regarded as a popular deity.

Again in the Svetasvatara Upanishad—IV.12—one part declares that Rudra is Hiranyagarbha whose birth or realisation in one's own heart must be seen. *Hiranya-garbham paśyata jāyamānam*. Another part says—III.4—*Hiranya-garbham janayāmāsa purvam*—"He (Rudra) begot Hiranyagarbha in the beginning." However, there is the paradox of Rudra being Hiranyagarbha and yet at the same time, the father of Hiranyagarbha. Skanda Upākhyana addresses Skanda as Hiranyagarbha, and if Skanda is identical with Agni or Rudra, and yet if he is at the same time the son of Agni or Rudra, this paradox must be taken to mean simply that Agni is delineated in the aspect of father Prajapati who is Svayambhū, self-born, the father manifesting himself as son, the child *Antaryāmi*, in all creatures.

## SKANDA IN THE MAHABHARATA

We now turn to examine the allusions to the birth of Karttikeya Skanda in the *Āranya parvam* of the Mahābhārata epic, in chapters 222 to 232. The Skanda Upākhyāna which is a continuation of the Agni Upākhyāna, forms the above chapters of the Mahābhārata which deal with the cycle of legends connected with the Skanda-Kumara cult. Mārkaṇḍeya is the narrator of the story. "I shall tell thee of that wonderful, famous, and highly energetic son of the Adbhuta Fire begotten of the wives of Brahmaṛṣis." (Mahabharata III.223.1-2).

Indra was distressed at the onslaughts of the Dānavas (asuras) and their subjugation of the devas and went to the Mandāra (Mānasa) Mount to pray for a hero who would save the devas from the misery of the asuras. There he encountered the asura named Késin and saved the maiden Devasenā from his grip. The maiden revealed to him that she was the daughter of Prajapati, and had vowed to marry a lord who will overpower all created beings.<sup>1</sup> Indra saw the moon entering the sun and sunrise on the Amāvāsyā day and wished for a hero to be born, who would destroy his

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1. Mahabharata—P. C. Roy's translation, pages 222-232.

enemy, the asuras. He appealed to Brahma who granted his wish. Indra and the Devas went to the abode of the seven Ṛsis to drink their share of the *Soma* in the sacrifice performed by them.

Agni who issued from the Sūryamandala performed his usual function of carrying the oblations made in the Āhavanīya fire to the gods, but as he came out of the sacrificial hall, he saw the lovely Ṛṣi-patnis and fell in love with them. It was not reciprocated and so he went to a forest in utter frustration. There Svāhā, the daughter of Dakṣa, loved Agni, and so she assumed in turn the forms of the six wives of the Ṛṣis excepting Arundhati, the wife of Vasishta, whose purity made it impossible for her to impersonate, and thus courted Agni. In order to hide her identity as she carried Agni's semen up the mountain summit, she changed into a hawk (Garuda) and deposited it in the pond, surrounded by Sara (reeds) forest—Sara-vana. There appeared the shape of a child with six faces, twelve arms, but one neck and one belly.

Thus was Kumara born. He had a big bow and a cock and the *Sakti* in his hands. He took up a conch and sent out a piercing peal and the world trembled at his sports. He pierced with his spear the Mount Krauncha and thereafter came to be worshipped as Skanda on the day of the bright half of the month.

When the Ṛṣis became aware of the birth of the child, they abandoned their wives, even though Svāhā repeatedly claimed him as her child. It was

Viswamitra who told the R̥ṣis that their wives were not at fault. Skanda's inordinate strength was the marvel of the Gods. The R̥ṣi-paṭnis adopted him as their son and nursed him and Skanda fulfilled their desires. Skanda worshipped his father Agni who became his protector. He was particularly loved by the mother who had the *Sūla* (trident) in her hand and blood was her food; she embraced Mahāsena and protected him as if he were her son. Agni became Naidameya, and sported with Skanda.

Indra was urged to destroy Skanda, his rival in valour. When he was engaged in this war, Skanda routed his army. Then Indra threw his Vajra weapon on Skanda; it pierced his right side, whence issued a golden coloured youth bearing the *Sakti* and came to be called Visākha. Finally Indra submitted and Skanda was made the Deva-Senapati, and all the Gods honoured him by endowing him with weapons of their choice.

In the *Sālyaparvam* (Chapters 46 & 47) of the *Mahabharata*, we find that Skanda opposed the grand foe of the Devas, Pānan, the son of Maha Bali. He sought refuge in Krauncha mount but Skanda's weapon of *Sakti* pierced it and destroyed him and his forces.

Skanda's Pārsadas (attendants) were fierce and carried away babes and girls and Skanda became known as Kumārapita; and all who want children in the world worship him and his parents. He was clad in red and was also called Sūra. He was worshipped by Sri, embodied in the Lotus.



Indra gave Skanda, Devasena as his queen. The wives of the ṛṣis complained to Skanda of their displacement by their noble husbands and sought a high place in heaven, besides expressing their desire to have him as son. Skanda granted all their wishes. The Krittikas which had Agni as devatā, were raised and the restoration of an even calendar took place. They became respected mothers of all the worlds, and Skanda made them protectors of all children and conferred the privilege of even possessing his sakti and assuming all fierce forms for teasing youngsters in the world, till they attain sixteen years of age. These gruesome crowd of 'grahas' issuing from Skanda's body had to be propitiated to minimise the evils due to them, but when pleased, they give boons to the worshippers.

In chapter 231 of the Vanaparva section of the Mahābhārata occurs the allusion to Brahmā repeating to Mahāsena, the story of his birth from Rudra and Umā. It is most significant to note the identification of Rudra with Agni, and Svāhā with Umā. Accordingly Skanda worshipped his father, Mahesvara. At Śvetaparvata was his coronation ceremony witnessed by the whole world; Rudra and Pārvatī left for Bhadravata after bidding the son to protect the seven Maruts vigilantly.

Soon the Asuras attacked the forces of the Devas and a fierce war ensued, and Mahiṣa vanquished them. Then appeared Skanda in red robes and with the use of the Śakti, he defeated Mahiṣa.\* The gods regained their freedom from fear and everyone rejoiced in

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\* Mahabharata, VIII, 5.56.

the great victory. Rudra asked the gods to look upon Skanda like himself: *Skandam paśyata māmiva*. Skanda completed the conquest of the three worlds. The last Sloka in chapter 231 is the *phalaśruti*:

*Skandasya ya idam viprah  
 pathejjanma samāhitah  
 Sa pustim iha samprāpya  
 skandasālōkyam āpnuyāt.*

## SKANDA IN THE RAMAYANA

In the Bālakānda of Vālmiki's *Ramayana*, young Rama and Lakshmana address Sage Viswamitra and ask him to elucidate on the greatness of the mother, and why the river Ganges should be divided into three streams and how she built her glory. In narrating the splendour of the Ganges, Sage Viswāmitra relates the testament of Muruga. (I-37). The date of this part of the poem is relatively late, but may well be in the early centuries, A.D.

The Gods and Rṣis were in search of a leader, *Senapati*, in their war against the Titans (asuras) and approached Brahma for advice and were told that Agni would produce with Ganga, the *Senapati* they needed. Then they went to Mount Kailas and engaged Agni to produce a son to Gangā, the daughter of the Mountain; when Agni approached Gangā, she assumed a divine form and as a result of their union, the whole mountain became golden in hue and a son Kumara took shape, and the Gods engaged the Kṛitikas to nurse him; they claimed him as their son and he became Kārttikeya. He was also known as *Skanda*, and Saḍānana as he developed six faces, be-

ing nursed by the Krittikās in the *Saravanai* Pond. He conquered the *daitya* (asura) groups by his strength and was crowned the commander of the divine forces—*Surasenāpati*. So related Viswāmitra to Rāma and Lakshmana, the story of Kumāra, on their way to Mithilā.

## SKANDA IN THE PURANAS

We now turn to the version of the Muruga cult as given in the Purāṇas. It is well known that the Epics and the Puraṇās are attempts to resume the threads of a broken tradition and that it is difficult for modern scholars to collate and reconcile Vedic data with Purāṇic data, though the latter especially in the region of mythology are obviously magnified echoes of truths incipient in the Vedas.

Out of the eighteen Puraṇās written by Veda Vyāsa, Skanda Puraṇā is said to be the thirteenth and is believed to contain the quintessence of the Śrutis. It consists of fifty kandas or sub-sections and six major sections with 30,000 verses. They are classified as:

Sanatkumāra Samhitā  
Sūta Samhitā  
*Sankara Samhitā*  
Vaishnava Samhitā  
Brahma Samhitā  
Saura Samhitā

The *Śankara Samhitā* which is the third section of the Skanda Purana consists of seven sub-sections or

Kāndas and deals with the birth, life and deeds of Skanda. They are described as:

Utpatti Kānda  
Asura Kānda  
Mahendra Kānda  
Yuddha Kānda  
Deva Kānda  
Daksha Kānda  
Upadeśa Kānda

They contain 13,000 verses and are also termed as the Śiva Rahasya Samhitā, wherein the mysteries of Śiva are revealed.\* The first six sub-sections were rendered in Tamil by the saint-scholar Kachiappa Sivachariar of Kānchi in the twelfth century and the seventh sub-section of Upadeśa Kānda was rendered in Tamil by his disciple, Konerriappa Mudaliyar. Thus we see that the Skanda Purāṇa is found in two versions. In the Northern version, the birth of Kumara from Śiva and Parvati is described at length and the chief enemy of the Gods for whose destruction Skanda is procreated is the asura by name Tāraka; whereas in the Southern version, it is Sura or Sūra Padma who is the chief foe and Tāraka and Simhamūkha are his younger brothers. In other important details, the two versions tally with minor variations, and we have clear evidence that the cycle of the Muruga cult was growing in immensity. One of the powerful weapons of this god is Sakti and according to Markandeya Purana 105-4, Viśwakarma

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\* Dr. R. E. Hazra was of opinion in his *Studies in the Puranic Rites* (p 157) that Skanda Purana was composed not earlier than 700 A.D. and M. M. Kane in *History of Dharma Sastra* Vol. V. pp. 911-12 accepts Dr. Hazra's dating.



fashioned it from the rays of the Sun, whereas in the southern version of Skanda Purana, it was the gift of Parvati. In the Padma Purāna and the Matsya Purāna occur biographical details of Kumara more or less consistent with the earlier biographies of his birth. The only difference is that Pārvatī tasted the water of the Saravanai pond where the *Tejas* of Śiva was deposited, and she gave birth to *Kumāra* from the right hip and *Skanda* from the left hip. Both forms joined into one form and assumed six faces and twelve hands. (Canto. 41 Sloka 118-217). In the Jnāna Samhitā (Chapter XIX) of the Śaiva Purānam is given the version of the birth as is found in the Sālyā Parva of the Mahābharatā, and the Vāyu Purāna (Chap. 72, V. 20-50) and the Matsya Purāna (chapters 158-60). The power of Śiva (Siva-Viryam or *tejas*) is taken to the Ganges from the sacrificial fire and the Ganges bore it to the Śaravanai pond. There the Pleiades (Kārttikai) nurtured him and he vanquished Tārakāsura.

## OTHER SOURCES OF WORSHIP OF KUMĀRA-SKANDA

In Kautilya's Arthasāstra, an interesting Sanskrit work on polity,<sup>1</sup> reference is made in 2.4.17 to the temples (Kosthān) of Gods like Durga, Vishnu, Subrahmanya and Indra. Kautilya further remarks that the city gates should be presided over by Brahma, Indra, Yama and Senāpati (2.4.19). Senāpati here refers to Skanda, who is the commander of the army of the Gods. Kautilya's testimony proves the worship of Skanda from pre-Christian times, and that there were temples dedicated to this God.

Patanjali (2nd century B.C.) commenting on Pānini's Vyākaraṇa Sūtra—V. 3.99—expressly refers to the images of Śiva, Skanda and Viśākha.

*āpanya ityacyate tatredam na siddhata:  
Sivah Skando Viśākha iti kim kāraṇam:  
Mauryaair hiranyārthibhih arcāh prakalpitaḥ:  
Bhavet tāsuna syat: yastvetah samprati  
pujārthas—tāsu bhaviṣyati.*

1. *Indian Antiquary*, 1918, pp. 157-61 and 187-95 where Jacobi maintains the composition was written in the 4th century B.C. during the life time of Chandragupta Maurya.

Kalidāsa also deals with the birth of Muruga in his fascinating poem *Kumāra Saṁbhava*, where Pār-vatī as the daughter of Himavān married Śiva and brought forth Kumara and finally vanquished Tāraka-asura.<sup>2</sup>

It shows that the worship of the above-mentioned Gods was prevalent in his time and popular among the masses in the Maurya period. In the *Kāśyapa Samhita*, in the chapter on Revati Kalpa, Karttikeya, Visakha, Skanda and Mahasena are spoken of as brothers of Goddess Sasthi. However these four deities were merged into one Being in later times. It can be inferred that Skanda and Viśākha were separate deities in the second century B.C. and the Mahabharatā account of Viśākha as coming out of the right side of Skanda when Indra's Vajra entered it, is taken by Bhandarkar as a stage in the progressive identification of the two. (*Vaisnavism and Saivism* P. 151).

We find evidence of the Skanda-Kumāra worship in the early coins of North India and these numismatic data have been collected and discussed by J. N. Bannerjee in his *Development of Hindu Iconography* (P. 86). The various dynasties that ruled India, during the different periods in the pre-Christian era, claimed themselves to be the votaries of Skanda-Kumāra. Certain Ujjain coins of the third century B.C. bear the legends of Brahmanya and Kumāra. The Kushanas and the Kshatrapas who ruled North-

2. *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XVIII, p. 128, Kalidasa's date is fixed in the first century B.C.

west frontier provinces of India were great devotees of Brahmanya-deva. Coins of the Kushana King Huvishka feature Skanda and Mahasena holding standards surmounted by cock or peacock, with which we may compare the later prescription in the *Bṛhat-saṃhitā* (57.4): *Skandah Kumarakupo Sakti dharo barhiketusca*. On another coin, we find Skanda-Kumāra and Viśākha similarly dressed and standing face to face, both of them holding a long spear.<sup>3</sup>

The republican class of Yaudheyas were the most ardent devotees of Skanda and their coins generally show him accompanied by a peacock. They flourished in certain parts of Punjab from 2nd century B.C. to 4th century A.D., and dedicated their Kingdom to Subrahmanya and issued coins bearing his figure and legends. In some coins, the legends read, "Bhagavan Swami, Brahmanya Kumara". 'Swami' is the most common word for God in India. It is significant 'Swami' is primarily the South Indian name of Subrahmanya alone. The devices on some of the silver coins of the Yaudheyas show the six-faced standing Kārttikeya holding a long spear (Sakti) in the right hand and the left resting on the hip. The reverse of the coin has Lakshmi with an aureole round her head and we may connect the Mahabharatā reference to 'Sri', which we had noted previously. (See—Allan, Plate XXXIX, 21).

The legend on a silver coin and that on a copper coin refer to *Bhagavat Swamino Brahmanyadevasya Kumarasya*. (See Allan, Plate XXXIX, 30).

The coins were perhaps issued in the name of the

3. Allan, Catalogue of coins in Ancient India, pp. 265-278.

deity because he was regarded as the spiritual and temporal ruler. The Yaudheyas were also known as Matta, Mayūras and Āyudhajivisangha. The latter term refers to a tribal republican organisation depending on arms. Their home was in Rohitaka much favoured of Kārttikeya, as we learn from the Mahabhārata II.32. 5-6, wherein is described the digvijaya of Nakula.

*Tato bahudhanaṃ ramyaṃ gavāḍhyaṃ  
dhanadhānyavat!  
Kārttikeyasya dayitam Rohītakamupādravat!  
tatra yuddham mahaccāsicchāsūrain  
mattamayūrakaih!*

There is clear evidence that Kārttikeya was the tutelary God of this region and the tribe inhabiting it. Pāṇini, who is one of the earliest authorities to mention the Yaudheyas, connects the Yaudheyas as a separate tribe in his time i.e., circa 7th century B.C. This is one of the ancient tribes in North India who regarded Skanda as their guardian deity.

A seal discovered by Spooner at Basarh bears a fan tail peacock facing the emblem peculiar to the eastern mintage of the Gupta silver coins of Kumāra Gupta I and his successors. Emperor Kumāra Gupta I, true to his name, issued peacock type of coins, and the peacock, Kārttikeya's vāhana, seems to have been a favourite bird of this king. The fact that the celebrated poet Kalidasa wrote such a fascinating poem on the birth of Kumāra (i.e. Skanda) proves the popularity of this God during his life time. (Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. XVIII, p. 128).

In the Gandharan School, Hariti is the presiding deity of fertility, and depicted with tender feelings on her face and with children on her breast and shoulder. She became the veritable mother Goddess in Gandhāra. Sometimes she is depicted as a four-armed deity holding a long trident and waterpot in her left hand, a true counter part of the Goddess Pārvatī. This probably inspired in later times Umā carrying Skanda as a child on her lap as in the Soma-skanda images of the Pallava dynasty.

The Ikshvakus of Nagarjunakonda of the 3rd Century A.D. were also great worshippers of Kumāra and called themselves as "Swami Mahasena patighitacha". The excavations at Nagarjunakonda have revealed the existence of Subrahmanya temples in the Ikshvaku period in the lower Krishna valley and Sir K. V. Soundara Rajan has argued that this cult may have come over to Nagarjunakonda from the western Kshatrapas with whom the Ikshvakus had matrimonial relations. He has stated that the identical figures of the two-armed Skanda as found in Nagarjunakonda with the cock at his waist and the Śaktidhāra are also found at the Baroda Museum and belonged to the Kshatrapa times. The Chālukya dynasty and the Pallavas too were worshippers of Kumāra and often their kings were equated with him.

It is well at this juncture to sum up what T. G. Aravamudhan says in his commentary on Sri Nilakanta Sastry's exposition on Muruga in a paper read before the Archaeological Society of South India on 22nd September, 1964:



"Muruga in the earliest Tamil classics and Skanda in the earliest Sanskrit classics are indistinguishable. Skanda is blended of aspects of Rig-Vedic Apam-Napat, Trita-Aptya, Soma, Agni, Indra, Varuna, Bṛhaspati and Hiranyagarbha. The Rig-Vedic mind has a prism built into it which splits Reality into a rainbow of bands of innumerable qualities and powers, irregular in undulation, which run into each other in varied combinations, so that, when each combination is anthropomorphized, we have a galaxy of variegated and versatile divinities, every one of them being a blend and not one being anything but a blend. Skanda as a Rig-Vedic divinity, and Muruga the Lord of the South Indian *Kurinchi*, the son of Koṭṭavai of the Śiva Pantheon, affirm the immensity and the variety of Reality."

*An approach to the symbolic significance of the myth of Skanda:*

There is always the *Ekam Sat*, the One called by different names who for purposes of praise and worship become different deities. And so begins the story of Vasishtha and the seven Rishis performing a sacrifice with their wives and Agni falls in love with the Rishi wives and Svāhā, daughter of Dakṣa, loves Agni and goes as the Rishi-wives. As stated the wives are the senses and the Rishis, the objects which both weave their spell in selfish (yajna) acts. There is in the inner heart Agni Kama, the Lover, the Para Purusha, really the great Indweller who wishes the senses to love Him, to give up phenomenal, perishable objectives and to sense the immortal self concealed in all phenomena. Where selfishness dwells, the self of

unselfishness cannot dwell and betakes Himself to wilderness. 'Vana' means water and so Agni hides in water, in the deep depth of the heart, unfathomable to selfish man. In Rig-Veda X Agni runs away and conceals in wood and water and the Devas find him as a child concealed in the phenomena. He queries them as to what is Agni's firewood, which leads one Godward and which of the Gods beheld his forms in many places. They reply that it was Yama that beheld him effulgent in His tenfold secret and verse 5 runs thus:

"Come, Man is pious and would fain do worship, he will be prepared; in gloom thou Agni dwellest,

Make pathways leading God-ward clear and easy and offer oblations with a kindly spirit".

Yama becomes the God of conscience, controlling the mind. He is able to find Agni who as the Self has gone into each object and is Viswarūpa, the *One-Manifold*. When everything is darkness and gloom in mind, Piety or righteousness prepares the worship and asks Him to come out from this hiding place. Agni's God-ward leading firewood can only be righteousness which is the only fuel which can make the Great fire, the Self, shine for us and lead us Godward.

Svāhā assumes the forms of the six Rishi wives and carries the Retas six times to Mount Sveta and puts into a golden pot, in a place overgrown with Sara reeds. In six days Kumāra bursts forth with

six heads and twelve hands wearing all sorts of weapons.

It is Medhā, Vāk in the form of Svāhā who loves Agni and the objects (herein the six husbands) having merged in Him, the object of objects, the Sacrifice—Prajapati. The six Retas which are the six seasons of the year, are changed into the son of sacrifice, for his father Agni represents the Sacrifice. If the sacrificer piously goes through the yearly sacrifice, the sun of the completed year rises to him as Aditiya, the son of altar Aditi, with six heads and twelve hands, with which to always remind him of the religious acts he has to perform year after year in its twelve months and six seasons. That Sun is not simply the phenomenal Sun but the Self in the Sun—that Self who as the One Self of the Universe shines in the Ākasha of the heart as *Guha*. This is another name for *Kumāra*.

*Guha* is also one of the names of Rudra, who is identical with Agni, and who is the son God in the Vedic stories. *Guha* seems to mean the concealed. Agni supports and earth is Visvāyu, the life of all. He is the great wealth to those who know Him dwelling in the cave, who approach the stream of Rita, who is sadasath or sacrifice and who release or churn Him out. R̥g-Veda I.67, 3 & 4.

The churning out of Agni who lies concealed in the *Arani* or firestick seems to symbolise the churning of the mind for drawing forth the self which lies concealed in the case of the heart—that Self who is the life of all and has gone into the cave, because as

Antaryami He is Svantarah. *Guha* is *Kumāra* as *Antaryami*.

"He played with a cock; and that bird became the ornament of his banner". As the crowing of the cock awakens men from their nightly slumber, the cock seems to be the symbol for prabodha, the awakened or enlightened state.

By discharging arrows, Skanda made a cleft in Mount Krauncha. The Knower uses his soul as an arrow in the bow of "Om-kara", and shoots it into Brahman which is the great Aim, and becomes one with it (Mandukya Upanishad). By breaking through the head of Samsara, he makes a path for the birds—hamsas or eagles as the knowers are delineated to fly upward through the hard crown of the head.

Indra and Devas sought to kill Kumāra as he was getting powerful but He was invincible. He sent a flame of fire from his mouth which burnt these armies of the Devas. There are two aspects of Indra and the Devas connected with Indriyas or senses—one in their sensual desires and the other connected with spiritual valour. When the first aspect is put down, the higher aspect rejoices.

Another name for Kumāra is *Viśākha*. It means 'effused', a name suggested by his being born of the Retas of Agni. It is the name of one of the asterisms and also means branched, forked; it is an attitude in shooting in which the archer stands with feet apart.

Another name for Kumāra is *Kārttikeya*, son of Kṛittikas (Pleiades) because he was nursed by them.

It means that Kumāra is the son of the year born when the vernal equinox was taking place at the Sun's conjunction with the Kṛttikas.

Counting the twenty-seven asterisms beginning with the Kṛttikas, when the latter was the asterism of the Sun's vernal equinox in the month of Vaisakha, the fourteenth asterism Visakha would be the point of the full moon of that month, and also the point of the sun's autumnal equinox six months afterwards. That point would bisect Visakha, part of which belongs to one half of the year and the other part to the other half and this may be the reason why the asterism was called Visakhe, the two branches.

*Ku* means *bad*; *Mara* means *killer*. Therefore Kumāra is one who kills the bad. *Skanda* means gushing or jumping; that which shines as the full moon (Visakha) in the attitude of shooting, by being then in conjunction with the asterism Visakha. *Skanda* is from a root meaning to 'gush up' or 'effuse'.

Kumāra's Sakti or Power seems to be that spiritual power awakened by the realisation of the soul as *Self-sacrifice*, a sacrifice by which the soul swelling beyond its own body loves all bodies as self. That is the Śakti weapon, the lance, which is able to kill the demons of selfishness and evil.

The Orion is the emblem of sacrifice; *Aja* means the goat as well as the unborn. *Aja*, the unborn, is one of the names of Brahma or Prajapati and the Mrigasirsha asterism of the Orion is the head of Pra-

japati. That seems to be the goat-head of Kumāra. The straight three stars of the Belt of Orion is likened to the arrow in the Vedic story of Rudra's shooting Prajapati, as the Stag Orion seems to mean here the Mrigasirsha asterism which is likened to the piercing weapon Sakti; his making the goat-head into the Sakti weapon is quite fit as the moon is the regent of that asterism.

It is only the devout heart that will see everything, everywhere as the father who has enselved all by universal love. The father has become all that is good and bad, because by Self-Sacrifice, He has multiplied and given himself completely to each soul as its real life. Can there be any sin in the Father of the One Manifold Son of Universal Love?

Man is pregnant with the glorious (Garbha) Son, and would see Him born, revealed, like the Sun, in the sky of his heart, if he realises Him by righteousness, keep the will for Self, but enlarge the Self so as to comprise all creatures and love as Self.

Kumāra is depicted in the Vedas as the Son who is Lokakrit, the maker of Heaven for His father; He is the all loving Son aspect of the Father, always borne in our heart's womb. The churned Agni is a symbol of that son and is addressed in the Veda as: *Putrah pitre Lokakrit Jatavedah*—"Thou art the son that makes or secures Heaven for thy Father—(the sacrificer who generates the sacred fire) i.e., realises the self concealed in all forms." Thus the son of God is the self concealed in all beings. That Skanda is always Kumāra is revealed by his being



called Sanat Kumāra. Sanat means 'always,' 'ever' and Sanat Kumāra means ever-infant. In the Chandogya Upanishad, in the seventh prapathaka, Sanat Kumāra is introduced as a teacher, teaching the Vast Self to Narada and at the end, the Upanishad says, "They say that Sanat Kumāra is Skanda, Yea that He is Skanda". In the Puranas Sanat Kumāra is a Rishi born as the son of Sanat, which is a name of the God Hiranyagarbha. Sanat Kumāra can be construed either as the Eternal child or the Eternal's child. Agni-Rudra, the Father of Kumāra, is also identical with Hiranyagarbha.

This was the origin of Skanda worship from the Vedic Age, and the Ithihasa stories about Skanda bear the impress of their having been recorded in their present forms many centuries later, after Skanda worship had come into vogue.

One significant thing is that the Son God is as beginningless as His Father, and is only revealed at the time of each cycle of the creation of the Universe, in order to enter into all as *Antaryami* and uphold the Universe. The Son God must be taken to have existed even before He was born of Rudra. As the Son spoken of is spiritual, He cannot be born unless the parents realise Him in mind. As soon as they see Him, He is born as Kumāra, and Universal Love flows everywhere. It is Father Rudra Himself that is revealed as son. The Ayoniya manner in which the Son God is manifested shows clearly that His birth is not Samsaric, but means spiritual manifestation. The Reta is mindborn, born by great tapas or austerity (Rig-Veda Sukta, X. 229).

There are variations in the story of the birth of Kumāra in the different sources like Mahabharata, Ramayana and the Puranas. They all agree that the Devas wanted a general to fight against the Asuras who were a terror to them and the burning of Kama by the fire of Rudra is associated by Kalidasa with the birth of Skanda.

The Asura killed by Kumāra is Mahisha according to *Mahabharata*, but Tāraka according to *Kumāra Sambhava*. Buffalo or Mahisha personifies darkness and Tāraka connected with a star may be darkness of night in which only stars shine. When the Son shoots down the darkness of ignorance, the same arrow which kills the buffalo goes in the shape of the self into the Supreme Self, which is just beyond darkness. When the animal nature of man is killed, the same arrow shoots into Mahisha the Great, the Supreme Self. *Mahisha* means both buffalo and great. Likewise *Tāraka* means the saviour or starry state which is immortal.

## THE CONCEPT OF MURUGA IN THAMILAHAM SOURCES

In the literature of the Tamils, Muruga has been acclaimed as the progenitor and presiding genius of the First Academy of Letters, dating to the prediluvian ages, and who taught the grammar and literature to Sage Agastya, who is reputed to be the Poet Laureate of the Second Academy of Letters dating back to 1000 B.C.

Language is the body; culture is the soul. In the form of the Tamil language moves the soul of culture, actuated by the living presence of Muruga. Muruga and Tamil culture are inseparable. Muruga taught the Tamil language to sage Aagstya and has been hailed as a divine Guru, teacher who embellished the first Sangam Age of the Tamils—Maduraikanchi 40-42. Tradition claims King Ukkira Kumāra Pandyan as a manifestation of the power of Muruga. The most ancient of the extant Sangam works, *Tolkappiam*, glorifies *Cēyon*, the red God seated on the blue peacock, ever young and resplendent and who carries the victorious lance called *Vel*, as the favoured God of the Tamils.

In *Kandar Alangaram*, St. Arunagirinathar, who lived in the fifteenth-sixteenth century A.D. extols Muruga as the embodiment of eternal energy and love:

“To those who seek the spouse of the fields, Valli,  
And experience the intense yearning for Kuma-  
ran,  
To them shall fresh sugar cane taste bitter,  
And ambrosial honey become sour,  
So sweet is the perennial bliss  
That flows from His ineffable love.

In the same garland of poesy, in another verse the poet sings of Muruga as blessing even those who are undeserving and unfaithful, in the sublime language of Muttamil (K. A. 22), for so great is his love of Tamil culture. Therefore this intrinsic relationship between the worship of Muruga and Tamil culture is maintained in unbroken tradition to this day.

### *A Study of Muruga:*

Who is Muruga? He who possesses *Murugu*, meaning beauty. Muruga connotes everlasting fragrance, youth, divinity and beauty. In tune with these eternal verities, the ancient Tamils worshipped the Supreme Godhead and called him *Muruga*. The natural fragrance, perennial youth, radiant divinity and beauty are the universal attributes of God, and the cherished name of Muruga conjures up all these attributes, which all religions accept. In every religious creed, the power and charm of Muruga permeates like the fragrance in a rose. He belongs to all nations and all climes.

In a world so fleeting and changing, man is in quest of the undying power of beauty and he discovers it in the natural sights and scenes around him. Saint Nakkirar was an ardent lover of beauty in its manifold form and in his poem *Tirumurugarrupadai*, he weaves a golden web of beauty and at one place, he defines beauty as the essence that springs from all natural objects and is opposed to all artificialities.

Kaipunainthiyatāk Kavinperu Vannapu.

T.M.G. 17.

Wherein can we behold such exceeding beauty, infinite fragrance, and youth? In the clear tops of mountains and sweet dales filled with the wafting smell of flowers, where the morning sun and evening sky spread their glowing red colours on the green fields below, in all natural panorama, the radiance of beauty can be enjoyed by one and all. It is this priceless boon of beauty that the ancient Tamils praised as Muruga. Where there is beauty, there is bliss. Where there is bliss, the name of Muruga will for ever reverberate. In the classical literature of the Tamils are found some of the most exquisite paeans of praise on Muruga as the God of Beauty.

"Thou art ever young, ever strong and ever beautiful". So sang Nakkirar, the celebrated poet of the third Academy of Letters. In the world of nature and in the heart of man, beauty dwells in everlasting grandeur in the form of Muruga. Heaven and earth, celestial beings and terrestrial inhabitants are knit in unison, singing the psalm of praise to Muruga, the God of love and beauty. Such a testament of beauty

is Nakkirar's *Tirumurugarrupadai*, where he glorifies the name of Muruga as "Perum Peyar Muruga" and the form so resplendent in:

Anaṅgu Sāl Uyarnilai Ṭaliyi pandaiṭan  
Maṇamkamaḷ Deivathu iḷanalam Kātti.

T.M.G. 289-290.

Muruga is an unadulterated word of Tamil origin, and was in popular usage from the era of the Sangam works, right down to modern times. Likewise Muruga also has come down as the God of energy, valour and deathlessness. The mountain is for ever a symbol of permanence, and Muruga came to be known also as the heir of the Kurinchi (mountainous) regions, the guardian deity of the mountainous, high-land folks—"Malai Kilavō."

Among the most ancient of the Tamil classics now available, may be classed the work called "*Tolkappiam*" which is taken as the most authoritative work on literary tradition and canons of literary criticism. The terrain was already, prior to this age of *Tolkappiar*, divided into four major regions, and the cult of Muruga was very much in vogue during this epoch.

"Iyarkaiyin ulluraiyāl iḷaṅgum Ḷelumporul".

The opening vista of *Tirumurugarrupadai* has an impressive picture of natural scenes and sights associated with the worship of Muruga. Likewise the closing lines too extol His praise as essentially the God of beauty, and Muruga is acclaimed as the embodied Beauty of nature, and nature in turn is extolled as the guide to Bliss.



"Pazhamuṭṭir Čolai Malai Kilāvōné". T.M.G. 367.

He is with form and without form,  
He is light and yet not of light.

13: Kandar Anubhuti by Arunagiri.

Thus in the Tamil texts of ancient Tamil Nad, Muruga has been extolled as the sweetest fragrance, signifying the perfume of ardent devotion, love and rapturous bliss that make men dance and sing with intoxicating piety. *Murugu* conveys the sense of auspiciousness, fullness and beauty ever associated with divinity. The luscious fruits, the beauty of variegated flowers, the strength of the mountains and vitality of the rains, the sympathy of man and nature awaken in the hearts of all lovers of Muruga, a sense of the unfoldment of the mystery of life. The simple word Muruga, uttered by any one at any time, acts as the elixir for man to overcome life's riddles and tensions and taste perennial bliss. (Aham. 28. 6-8 and Kalitokai Kurinchi 52: 9-10).

The objects of nature reflect the powers of the material universe and this substratum of *Māya* supports human life. Without the five sensations, all movements will subside. Without the five elements, there will be no sentient beings. Through the senses, man enjoys the sensations of pain and pleasure, and these evanescent delights, he finds fleeting. He looks up to that enjoyment which is everlasting and begins to understand that it stems from divine love, and eternal light.

According to *Tolkappiam*, in Col. Kilavi. 4, *Teivam* is that which possesses light. The root is

*Tiv* and connotes that God is the source of divine light. *Teivam* is a pure Tamil word, derived from the root *Tevu*. According to *Tolkappiam*, *Tevu* means the absolute power which is capable of taking any form. Tol: Çol: Uri: 47. This explains the idea of the transcendent absolute taking various personal forms, to guide man in the realm of divine light or wisdom. The concept of God as the source of wisdom, manifesting itself as a Guru or Teacher, is a fundamental concept in the religion of the Tamils. There is ample evidence in *Paripadal* and *Tirumurugarrupadai* to support the view that Muruga was worshipped as a source of knowledge and power, in the form of a divine Guru. (T.M.G. 262-265 and *Paripadal* 14-23-24).

The concept of God as a source of light and wisdom is conveyed in a graphic simile by Nakkirar in the opening lines of *Tirumurugarrupadai*, where he compares the rising sun to Muruga—'Avirozhi'. 'Iyavul' is another word which connotes the power of wisdom, that guides the human being in the right path. 'Iyavu' means path. (Ainkurunuru 326: 3) God manifests in the form of a deity that administers human destiny as well as the law of cause and effect—"Paal Varai Teivam"—*Tolkappiam*, Çol. Kilavi 58. The early poems on Muruga in the Sangam literature extol him as the supreme object of adoration, transcending cause and effect and all the categories of the material universe. He is the goal as well as the way leading to the goal.

"What can days signify? What can ills  
forebode?

How can the weight of Karmic deeds oppress?  
 Death shall lose its sting to him  
 Who hast taken the name of Muruga on his  
 lips".

38: Kandar Alankaram by Arunagiri.

In *Paripādal* occurs a memorable poem which delineates the reward of worshipping Muruga—*Cevvél*—the radiant son of the God who destroys the world—*Kaaikadavul Seyé-Paripadal* 5: 13. "We do not seek for wealth or worldly happiness but we seek thy Grace and Bliss", p. 5.

The sixfold invocations (*Arumurai Vaaltu*) according to Tamil traditions include invocation to rain also, as it is the embodiment of God's Grace. (*Tolkāppiam Ceyyul* 109-*Perāciriya*'s Commentary). The various kinds of invocation were classified in another way in praise of six godly objects (1) Saints, (2) Deities, (3) Kings, (4) Cows, (5) Rain and (6) The World. In the description of the regional features (*Karuporul*) of the five natural regions, deity or God is ranked as the first object (*Tol. Porul Ahattinai* 20) since even in those early times, God signified the goal of life. The lance of Muruga is compared to the lightning that precedes the cool rain. (*Kurinchipattu* 51-53). It is also the symbol of grace and of wisdom that penetrates the hard layers of ignorance in man. A poem in *Ahanānuru* conveys the meaning of Muruga as fragrance and fertility—"Murugu Murankollum Tēmpai Kanni"—*Aham* 28.6-8.

Muruga, the God of the hills, is the source of eternal fragrance. *Kilittokai: Kurinchi*. 52: 9-10.

The birth of Muruga immediately after the destruction of the Tripura or the triple fortress and after the fall of Manmatha, the God of love, indicates that Muruga, who is the laya aspect of Lord Śiva, "Ālamar Selvan Mahan", (Paripadal 14: 23-24) is the embodiment of spiritual energy which alone can overcome the triple *malas* or bonds, and the deluding senses that ensnare man. Thus He works through his wisdom and divine Grace.

According to V. S. Chengalvaraya Pillai, the learned commentator on *Tiruppugazh*, the anthology of poems on Muruga by St. Arunagirinathar, the Muruga cult was in existence even before the Ramayana period. *Tolkappiam*, the classical Grammar of the Second Academy which flourished after 1000 B.C. refers to the three forms of worship namely: *Kodinilai*, *Kantali* and *Valli* (Purattinai 33) as supplementing the invocation to God as the most significant form of worship:

Kodinilai Kantali Valli Yentra  
 Vadu neengu Sirapin Mutalana Mūntrum  
 Kadavul Vālhōdu Kaṇṇiya varumé. 33.

Naccinarkiniyar in his commentary on the above poem considers that *Kodinilai* means the *Sun*, since he appears on the eastern horizon which is known as *Kodidisai*. It signifies a formless state of self-existence without any attachment.

*Kantali* means the absolute which transcends word and thought. *Valli* connotes the moon which like a beneficiary showers ambrosial grace. Some

scholars interpret these three terms as the Sun, the Moon and the rain respectively. These three stages of worship could be linked up with the concept of God as explained earlier in *Tolkāppiam* and the Sangam works and also related to the cult of Muruga, which was deeply rooted in the religious life of the Tamils whose civilisation flourished some three thousand years ago.

*Kodi* also means banner. We find many references of praise to the banner of God Muruga in *Tirumurugarrupadai* and *Paripadal* and other Sangam works. "Vēlan Kodi Maram" *Paripadal* 17: 2-3. Any festival opens with the hoisting of the banner of God who is associated with the festival as in *Pattinapālai* (159-160) and *Tirumurugarrupadai* 38-39. The celebration of the victorious banner of Muruga is a noteworthy act of worship in these poems.

*Kantu* means that which binds up. *Kantali* implies that the transcendental God destroys the bonds of human limitation and all types of bondage. The achievement of this supreme objective is believed to be the reward of a true worshipper of Muruga in *Tirumurugarrupadai*, according to the commentator Naccinārkiniyar. *Kodinilai* as representing the banner, symbolically points to the aspects of determined activity (*Kriyai* state) while *Kantali* denoting the elimination of bondage implies the aspect of wisdom and detachment whereby the triple bonds of ego (*anavam*) karmic deeds (*kanmam*) and ignorance (*maya*) are subdued.

*Valli* means the stem of a plant (*Puram* 352.5). The stem takes up the life-giving tissues from the

root and causes the flowers to blossom, out of the food taken from the root. Human pleasures are the flowers of Sakti, who derives the life-giving energy from the cosmic root of God. Valli becomes the symbol of the benevolent mediator between the finite and the infinite. Thus Valli becomes the consort of Muruga and is the embodiment of the will power of God. Valli is the manifested form of the concept of spontaneous love which is purely a Tamil tradition immortalised in the poetry of the Sangam works. Valli means the creeper and symbolises the aspect of yearning and seeking a support—the support of the firm love and grace of God. Thus *Kodinilai* leads to activity (*Kriyai*) which is symbolised in *Devayanai*, the consort of Muruga. *Kantali* leads to emancipation from bondage which leads eventually to wisdom (*Jnanam*) which is symbolised in *Vél*.

When the distinctions of opposites and plurality fade away as between the seer, seen and the sight, then all props fall away and the steady pillar of God supports the devotees and this is *Kantali* as interpreted by Naccinārkiniyar, and is the ultimate goal of the path of devotion as conceived by Nakkirar, in his poem of *Tirumurugarrupadai*. The primitive worship was conducted under a tree and a stone, was erected as a symbol of the deity. This was known as the *Kantu*. (Paripadal 19.104). According to Swami Vedachalam in *Tamilar Maṭam*, p. 173, the form of Śivaliṅgam is the oldest form of fire worship, since the pillar and the base resemble the burning flame and the firepit.



The pillar or *Kantu* finds a place in the Vedic Aryan system of worship too. In the place of vedic sacrifice, a pillar was erected and it was called *Yupam* or *Vēlvittunam*. Mantras and hymns were chanted beside the *Yupam*. This was the protecting deity of the vedic sacrifice in the form of *Kantu* or pillar of God who came to be known as *Kanda* or *Skanda*.

*Valli* leads to intense love (*Iṇṇai*) which leads to devotion (*Bhakti*). These three concepts of the Tamils referred in *Tolkappiam* bring out the three stages of worship linked up with the cult of Muruga. *Valli*, according to *Tolkappiar*, also came to mean a kind of frenzied dance. This was called *Vallikūttu*, when the women dressed and adorned themselves as *Valli*, the consort of Muruga, and delighted in a group dance.

Thus the concept of Muruga as the supreme source of energy is developed through the frenzied dances, to the panoramic vision of Muruga dazzling in the natural setting of mountains and sea coasts. The Tamils glorified the vision of the Sun God whenever nature put forth its brilliant sights. In the sunrise and sunset, the source of evolution and involution, they beheld the majesty of the sun and praised Muruga for His life-giving rays of grace, which awakened man from the deluge of darkness. The Sun God is celebrated for his flawless righteousness and equanimity, and is hailed as the very life-spirit of nature. Nature in the spring is a season of flowers, which offer lovely symbols for the deities. Muruga was considered a source of fragrance, "*Vēri Kamazh Neduvēl*"—as stated in *Ahananuru* 272: 98: 27: 10-15.

Here *verri* means fragrance. Muruga was associated with certain flowers of the Kurinchi region. Kāntal was associated by Tolkāppiar to denote the frenzied dance of *veriyādal* before Muruga. Tol: Purattinai 5.7—"Verriyaatu Ayanṛṭa Kāanṭal".

Kāntal flower indicated chastity. The maidens of the hills offered kāntal flowers to God Muruga and prayed for prosperity and chastity—Aham. 338: 5-7. The fragrance of kāntal denotes chastity and *verikkūttu* aims at the preservation of the chaste life of the highland maidens. So the aspects of nature and the concept of god have had close links in the evolution of the religious thought of the Tamils.

The community of a village assembled at a central place, under some tree like the banyan or the kadamba tree, and a deity was worshipped as the guardian God, to promote communal welfare. Tirumurugārrupadai 218-226. Tolkāppiar's reference to the regional deities could be interpreted in the light of this concept of God. In Kuruntokai 105.2, Muruga is celebrated as 'Kadiyum Kadavul', the God who feeds on rich fresh yields. Hence his temples were built not only on the mountains, but in other centres where nature displayed her productivity as portrayed in *Tirumurugārrupadai* by Nakkirar. T.M.G. 223-225. A blend of the concepts of Māyon and Cēyon and a fusion of religious cults is a conspicuous feature in the Sangam works of Paripādal, 3: 37 and 3: 43. Here Māyon is described as the lord of evolution of the cosmic elements. The concept of the trinity is brought out in Paripādal, 13: 14: 25 and also Muruga is depicted as the supreme Absolute, having in Him-

self all the elements and aspects of the other Gods—Paripādal 5.56-70.

Muruga is delineated in the Sangam works as a great lover. Tirupparankunram is a hill shrine situated among green cornfields and pastures verdant. The meadows and slopes are adorned by varied flowers that attract the celestial maidens to come down to earth and deck themselves with these lovely flowers. In Kurinchipattu is a reference where the hero of the hilly region makes his lady-love believe in his solemn promise of fidelity by resorting to a customary pledge. He takes a handful of water from a pool and drinks it and makes a promise swearing by the God of the hills, Muruga. (Kurinchi: 208-211). Venkai flowers in full bloom denote the season of marriages. A hero adorns himself with venkai flowers and dances with the young maidens to the tune of Tondakapparai. The hero looks so handsome that he is compared to Muruga. They dance at the foot of a hill with sparkling waterfalls. (Ahanānūru 118: 1-5).

Muruga as the God of love was celebrated by the maidens of heaven and earth. They gathered in large numbers in His sanctified natural abodes. They delighted in singing the praise of Muruga, the celestial bride-groom and the consort of Devayānai (T.M.G.1: 1-6). The significant role of consorts is celebrated by the Sangam poets even in their poems in praise of their benefactors and patrons. (Silappadigāram Patikam 38-54; Aṭṭyakunallār's commentary). The Sangam poets describe the queens of the kings as the source of initiative for the many charitable acts of the patrons. Likewise, the consorts of the heavenly

patron, God Muruga, too are deified in Sangam poetry. (Paṭṛupattu 90: 49-54; Aham 314: 15; Malaipatukattam 58).

In Tamil Nad, Muruga is considered as the fountain head of the tenderness of love. In answer to the prayers of his devotees, he presents himself as united with Grace, the symbol whereof is two-fold—a consort Devasenā or Devayanāi of divine origin, in attestation of the divinity of Grace, and another consort, Valli, whose associations are human, in affirmation of the gracious love the lord has for mortals. The union with grace marks him as one intimately related to *Brahmam* who is nothing if not Grace. Hence *Muruga* is *Su-Brahmanya* in these manifestations too. He is also *Skanda* with his lance representing illumination, which destroys the forces of avidya.

Religious customs and modes of worship are intended to teach mankind to lead a happy life. These evidences explain that love and grace are the eternal attributes of God, and the worship of the deities in the form of God and His consort only help man to cultivate and refine the instinct of love and affection which are inherent in him. (Tolkappiam: Porul: 27).

## MURUGA TRADITION—SOCIAL AND LITERARY BACKGROUND

We have seen that the sources of the Muruga cult in the Tamil regions can be traced to the Sangam literature, a study of which helps us to understand the literary and social background of the period ranging from 5th century B.C. to about the 2nd century A.D.

The tradition of Iraiyanar Kalaviyal's commentary for Sutram I of *Tolkappiam* describes three epochs of literary culture, actively nourished by the organised efforts of Kings and poets under the patronage of the Academy of Letters. Sangam works comprise the literature classified under *Ettutokai* and *Pattuppattu* which include eight anthologies and the ten idylls and the grammatical treatise *Tolkappiam*, the earliest available work of the Sangam Age.

It has been noted that *Tolkappiar* dealt exhaustively with the literary canons and conventions of the Tamil language, literature, and the cultural and historical traditions of the Tamils. *Tolkappiam* must have evolved from a rich heritage of culture that must have existed in the Tamil territories prior to its gene-

sis. This grammar work is ascribed to the age before the 5th century B.C. which is the age of Panini. *Tolkappiam* is well versed in the grammatical treatise of *Aindra* which is supposed to be the ancient Sanskrit grammar text, anterior to Panini, whose age is the 5th century B.C. (See S. K. Belvalkar, *Systems of Sanskrit Grammar*, pp. 12-13.) Taranath, the Tibetan historian, states that God Karttikeya, (another name for Muruga) revealed the *Aindra Vyakarna* to Satavahana, and *Tolkappiam* has been greatly influenced by the *Aindra School of Grammar* as testified in the prefatory verse by Panamparanar, and that the *Aindra School* was pre-Panini.

In *Tolkappiam*, Marapiyal, the major aspects of literature are depicted in the form of cryptic definitions which explain the fact that the Lord God is the primary source of wisdom. Therefore the prime source book of knowledge or *Mudal Nūl* is the revelation of the sages who are the manifestations of the power of God. God is the primal source of wisdom, *Vaalarivan*. According to the sources found in Iraiyanar Kalaviyal's commentary, Siva and Muruga were among the poets of the first Tamil Academy. This implies, according to the erudite scholar, Professor K. Subramania Pillai, that the poets of the first Sangam Age composed their poems under the divine inspiration of the grace of Siva and Muruga. Only after the initiation of God who appears as an eternal Guru, pure wisdom can be drawn on the horizon of the human mind. The legend that extols Muruga as a divine Guru and the preceptor of poets explains this principle of the divine origin of knowledge. In *Tiru-*



*murugarrupadai*, Muruga is addressed as the eternal poet who expounds eternal scriptures.

According to Sutram five of Porul, Ahattinai Iyal of *Tolkappiam*, the hill country called Kurinchi inhabited by the kuravars is closely associated with the worship of God Muruga; as pasture land (Mullai) with the worship of Vishnu; as the sea-board (Neithal) with that of Varuna; and the cities (Marutham) with that of Indra. The Tamil tradition attaches deep significance to the subjective and objective recesses of thought and to the division into an outer (Puram) aspect and an inner (Aham) aspect relating to man's relationship with the world, and to his inner life and his attachment to the Supreme Being.

The outer significance of the four divisions has reference to the love of man and woman and in the inner or esoteric sense, they indicate the relationship of man to God as for example, the "Kurinchi" brings out the union of the human soul to the divine Paramatman. It is significant that Muruga is the presiding deity of the Kurinchi land, the region that signifies the union of the lovers. Every human being has a natural attraction to the worldly pleasures and the Tamils exalted the love between man and woman as the basic analogy to develop the divine love in him, that shall lead to the supreme God-Head. The Aryans, on the other hand, presented philosophical and moral truths under the guise of myths, stories and episodes in their *puranas* which formed the basis of their religious core.

The general features of the Sangam literature

reveal an age of culture which was before the Buddhist and Pallava periods. The religious tempo of the Sangam Age was marked by tolerance and an intense devotion to Māyon and Sēyon. Among these works, *Paripadal*, one of the remarkable poems of the Eight Anthologies, and *Tirumurugarrupadai*, one of the poems of the Ten Idylls (*Pattuppattu*) embody the essence of the Muruga worship in the Sangam Age. A detailed account of the chronology of the works is not attempted here, as the concept of God, with special reference to Muruga worship of the ancient Tamils, presents a consistent ideology and philosophy of thought which was already in existence in the predominantly Tamil areas of South India.

*Muruga as the Regional God of the mountains:*

Muruga has been specified as the God of the mountainous region and the Ćutirams or Axioms of Tolkappiar indicate the main lines of worship of the Tamils, who drew from the varied geographical conditions and regional flora and fauna, their peculiar spiritual appeal. The external forces of nature had a deciding factor in determining the inspiration of the inner life. Māyon was the deity of the pastoral Mullai lands, while Cēyon, the youthful God of red hue, was the deity of the hilly regions. Vēṇṭan or Indra held sway over the fields and Varuna presided over the sea and coastal lands, according to Ahattinai 5 in *Tolkappiam*.

In "Porul" section, Tolkappiar states that the red-hued, child-like God takes his abode in the mountainous tracts of the earth encircled by dark clouds.

'Sēyon mēya Maivarai ulagamum'. Kurinchipattu was composed by Kapilar in order to elucidate the beauty of the Tamil language and culture to the Aryan King, Brahattan. It consists of 261 lines of blank verse and describes the episodes of the union of two lovers in the harvesting season. A young highland maid sports amidst the pools and springs and decks herself with flowers. She wards away the birds that come to eat the ears of the ripened corn. A young hero who has strayed from his hunting companions chances to meet this deerlike maid called Valli, and they meet and love each other. The parents find her melancholy and love-lorn and invoke Muruga by performing a sacrifice in a festival of dance:

"Veriyaadi venmariaruthu saanti vila seythal".

The primal deity of the Kurinchi land was Muruga, and his lance and drum are extolled. The elephant, sheaves of corn, bamboo groves and horn music also are the accessories of Muruga worship. In Kuruntokai sung by Perum-Devanar, in the invocatory stanza occurs the description of Muruga as wielding the lance and the cock banner ever ready to protect His devotees:

"Neduvēl sēvelaṅ kōdiyōn kaapa".

Kuruntokai 107 further elaborates this idea:

"Kuni eykkum udukkai, kunrin  
Nenji paka erinda am Sudar neduvēl  
Sēvalan kōdiyōn, katavul vāltu'.

The people of the hilly region cherished their God as the source of energy and the God of the red-hue

typified also wrath and revolt and helped the people overcome all obstacles; and out of gratitude, they worship him with millet and honey. They rejoice in songs or dances. His roseate light radiates these hill resorts and showers the people with abundant rains. In these beauteous sanctuaries, Cēyon or Murugan manifests his love, strength and victory over opposing forces, and this ideal takes root in the Muruga tradition. There is also another aspect to his worship. He is not only a God of Love, Cēvvel, but also the God of victorious living and combats inimical forces by warring against them, as testified in the same classic:

“Veriyari cirapin vevaai vēlan  
veriyāṭṭ ayaṁta kaantalaga”.

*Velan* is also a typical Tamil name as Muruga, and stands for the God as well as His High Priest who performs the ritualistic worship. *Velan*, the devotee of Muruga, sports in glee on the slopes of the hills with the rivulets flowing and the white sand spread at his feet, and his devotion expresses in dances. We find this concept of Muruga impregnated in the Sangam works. In *Kalitokai*, *Ahananuru*, *Aingurunuru*, *Kurinchipattu* and *Pattirupattu*, we find many allusions to Muruga, depicting his episodes of love and war, his adornments and weapons, the lovers invoking his protection as the guardian deity of the hills, his hallowed abodes, favourite dances performed by his devotees and the manifestation of His grace on those who worship Him.

The people of the hilly region believed that the abundance of their natural wealth of the region de-

pendent on the grace of Muruga and on their own moral conduct. They offered Him the fresh produce of honey and millet and fragrant flowers. A poem in Kalittokai 39: 11-14 sounds a note of warning that the land will not produce its plenty if the highlanders offend Muruga by their evil conduct. Muruga is pleased with the offerings of the bounty of nature as celebrated in the line—*kadiyum kadavul* in Kuruntokai 105: 2—the God that delights in the offerings of fresh yields. In the hilly region, we find God's plenty and charm. Aham: 82: 1-10.

Cēyon or Muruga had his temples in the hilly tracts, on the top of mountains with their abundance of honey and millets. Here dwelt the lovely maiden Valli whose love he courted. (Paripadal 19-1.7). Cēyon, the red-hued God, is the guardian deity of the festival of sacrifice after the victory with the warring hordes. The wrath of Muruga, as the war God, is delineated in many a poem in Sangam works: Madurai Kanchi 180-181. Purananuru. 16: 12. 158: 16-18; 189: 5-6. Ahananuru 158: 16-18, and Nattinai 225: 1-2,

The setting sun with its flaming hue reminded the poets of two of their warrior deities in Cēyon or Muruga, and Koṟṟavai or Kāli: Ahananuru 360: 6-9 158: 16-17. The red flowers namely Kāntal, Vengai Vetchi, Kadambu, Alari and lotus were considered the favourite emblems of the red-hued Muruga and Koṟṟavai. He delighted in scarlet colour—Ainkurunuru 308: 2-4. Kurinchipattu 66, Kuruntokai 1. 1-3, Paripadal 19: 97-100. Muruga is described as the Lord of the earth. The poem ends by saying that this world is eternally safe under the protection of

Muruga. "His feet are as tender and red as the lotus flower. His mien is red like coral. His garland is red like the grains of kunri. His spear had penetrated the heart of the krauncha hill. He displays the cock banner". (Invocatory Song—Kurun-tokai).

The image of Muruga evokes intense love. The lotus is tender and possesses honey. So also are His feet which are full of tender grace. He is the embodiment of energy and active creation. The heart of man which is as hard as granite like the krauncha mount can only be penetrated by his spear of wisdom. The cock wakes up the world immersed in deep slumber. It is the harbinger of dawn. So also His grace wakes up the souls who are immersed in the darkness of ignorance. Muruga in this context has become more than a regional deity. He is the *alpha* and the *omega* of human life.

It is significant that these classical poets sing the praise of Muruga, so that they may be sustained on earth and rocked by time in joy and prosperity.

"Ellā uyirum nilanaium pozhuṭaiyum pettu  
Inpam ṭuika vēnduṭalin". *Tolkappiam*.

Muruga is the Primal (first) One who holds sway over space and time. Tol. Aham. 4 and 18.

The hilly peasants known as Kuravars, in their community worship, sang the songs to the tune of *Kurincci*, which was delightful to Muruga, in order to invoke his blessing for seasonal rains and good



crops. Like the term Cēyon, Muruga had another popular name Cevvēl, celebrated in the Sangam poems. The name here implied one who kindled love. Muruga thus became the embodiment of youth and love. Cevvēl showered his blessings on the nuptial day of the lovers. The young hero pledged his love to his bride, in the name of Cevvēl. In *Paripadal* 8:127-130, 'Muruga was glorified as the wealth of Sakti in union with the God who swallowed poison for the redemption of the world'. Such was the potency of Muruga's selfless love, impregnated with the aspect of knowledge and fiery energy as the son of Koṟṟavai in *Tirumurugarrupadai* (Palaiyon Kuzhavi 256).

The cult of Cēyon as the God of victory had close affinity with the cult of Kāli. Muruga was the cosmic power beneath all actions of mankind. He was the centrifugal force around which revolved the whole universe. He was the sovereign of the seven worlds, the life-force of the world. That was the import of the poems. We shall now examine in detail the concept of Muruga in the philosophical evolution, in the religious thought of the ancient Tamils as delineated in *Paripadal* and *Tirumurugarrupadai*.

We have selected these two valuable sources for the elucidation of the Muruga tradition from among the ancient classics. The condition of the temples, the modes of worship and offerings of the devotees, their customs, festivals and cultural life are depicted in *Paripadal* and *Tirumurugarrupadai* in exquisite poesy. Some references throw light on the religious and philosophic tenets of the Tamilians; some reveal

the details of His form, His attributes and the legends connected with His exploits. From these sources of ancient Tamil heritage can be gleaned clear evidences which help in interpreting the synthetic concept of God Muruga. An analysis of these two poems opens new perspectives and avenues of research on the most fascinating subject of Muruga worship.

“Thou Lord of Kurinchi hills that clash against  
the skies,

Thou hast the undying fame of cleaving asunder  
the mountain great”.

Tirumurugarrupadai 266-267.

### *The Cult of Muruga in Paripadal*

*Paripādal* is the fifth in the series of collected poems known as *Ettutokai* which consists of eight anthologies namely, *Narrinai*, *Kuruntokai*, *Ainkurunuru*, *Patirruppattu*, *Paripadal*, *Kalittokai*, *Ahananuru* and *Purananuru*. Among these anthologies, except *Patirruppattu*, *Purananuru* and *Paripadal*, all the rest deal only with the aspects of love. These works belong to the third Academy of Tamil Letters, which flourished from the third century B.C. to the second century A.D. *Paripadal* is the only extant work based on the metrical composition known as *Paripadal*.

Poetry, drama and music form the three main divisions of the Tamil Academy and not many works in the last category of compositions in classical music are now extant. *Paripadal* contains twenty-two poems

of which six are addressed to Lord Vishnu (Tirumal), eight to God Muruga and eight to Vaikai, the river celebrated in the Pandyan territory of the Tamils. According to the canons of Tolkappiam, Paripadal is a type of poem set in a musical metre, which evokes the spirit of love with all its accessories. Hence this anthology throws light on a significant aspect of the life of ancient Tamilians and explains the interrelation between the devotional love and the instinctive quality of human relationship.

The eight poems on Muruga are sung by different authors at different periods but they all delineate their intense love for Muruga and describe the popular forms of his worship during that age. The condition of the temples, festivals and rituals of worship reveal a clear concept of God Muruga. In these songs are depicted his divine birth, exploits and gracious deeds, his weapons and love episodes, his prowess and insignia which exalt him as the guardian deity of the Tamils—*Cervēl*, who took *Valli*, the Kurava maid, as his bride. He is also the commander in chief of the Devas, the consort of Devayanai, daughter of Indra. A poet of Paripadal by name Nal-Antuvan is celebrated in Ahananuru, an early work of the third Sangam Age, and in this way the antiquity of Paripadal is established.

*Poem No. 5*

*Cervēl*

Thou ridest on the Pinimuga elephant;  
With thy lance, thou piercest the Surapadman,  
Hidden 'neath the mango tree in the ocean.

Thou who destroyeth the illusory Krauncha  
mount,  
Six-faced One! Thou with thy arms twelve  
Art risen like the rays of the morning sun,  
Beautiful as the fresh blown lotus bloom  
Thou son of the God of Samhara, Cevvēl  
So utters Velan in his paeon around the dancing  
pole,  
Fully possessed with thy holy presence.

Yet art thou beyond this, Lord of the world!  
Thou who art the beloved son of Uma and Siva,  
Nurtured in Saravana pond by the six pleiades,  
Became divided into six forms by Indra's  
thunderbolt,  
Only to be united into a single form again.

In thy infancy, thou won over Indra without  
weapons,  
And so the Devas acclaimed you as their Leader.  
The God of Fire bequeathed thee with a cock,  
Indra gave the peacock, Yama, the ram,  
And the others endowed thee with weapons  
Which thou didst bear in thy arms twelve.

Thou excelled in valour Indra the king of the  
Devas,  
Thou donned the victorious Kadamba garland.  
The unrighteous can never attain thy Feet,  
While the righteous seers are blessed by thee.

*We implore thee not for boons of enjoyment or  
wealth  
But for thy grace beatific, love and virtuous deeds.*

Almost all the myths relating to the birth and exploits of Muruga or Skanda are found in the Paripadal poems. In the eighth poem, we find reference to the holy mount of Tirupparankunram, as the favourite abode of Muruga, and where congregate Vishnu, Brahma and Rudra, the Gods and Devas, the Titans and ascetics, sages and seers, to pay their homage to the supreme God.

This famed hill of Parankunru is likened to the sanctified Himalayan peak with its mountain lakes and rushing rivulets.

"Thou who penetrated the Krauncha Mount by  
the lance,  
Thy resort of Parankunram resounds to the  
vibration  
Of thy devotees' praises and emanates sweet en-  
joyment  
To the lovers in their tryst.

The undulating pathway from Madura to Parankunram  
Is filled with the music of the bees and birds;  
The dales and plains are strewn with flowers in  
bloom;  
The water lilies nod in the pond, their fragrance  
To the gentle southern breeze float around".

The poet thus picturesquely portrays the natural beauty amidst which the worshippers of Muruga wend their way, with their offerings, from Madura to Parankunram. (Paripadal—8).

Tirupparankunram was a temple of endless festivals which gave opportunities for amorous sports of lovers who indulged in varieties of merry-making. The temple is glorified as the abode of Muruga with the consort Devayanai, whose marriage with Muruga was celebrated in Tirupparankunram in honour of his victory. The devotees during the festival entreated the gods for victory in their warfare and success in their matrimonial affairs. These facts are clearly evidenced in *Paripadal*.

Tirupparankunram was the temple of Muruga, which attracted young devotees, both men and women, who entreated the God for the successful fulfilment of their love. Muruga was the guardian deity of lovers. The temple was crowded with young lovers who made the place very noisy on account of quarrels and merry-making. Moreover the temple was situated among the green corn fields where there was endless noise due to the sounding of drums at the harvest time. (Maduraikanchi—262-266).

Tirupparankunram is described as the temple of Muruga situated in the west towards Madurai, capital of the Pandyan King. The road to this mount is through enchanting green corn fields dotted with lotus ponds and lilies in full bloom. Innumerable water flowers symbolically represent the endless grace of God to the yearning mortals who delight in earthly happiness and who are finally led to taste the divine honey at His Lotus Feet. (*Paripadal* 18: 30-50).

The temple was a centre of learning, religion and cultural activity. Literary competitions and contests



in the form of debates and music concerts were conducted during the temple festivals which were the main attractions for big crowds to assemble. (*Paripadal* 8: 29-35).

Since Muruga was the guardian deity of lovers, Tirupparankunram, the hill abode of Muruga, was the divine nursery and pleasure-garden for lovers. He was also the custodian of immortal love. *Paripadal* furnishes a graphic pen-picture of this aspect. The philosophy and principle of love evolved in Tamil culture under the tradition of Aham is full of significance. According to the grammatical treatise, the regions of hills and its environs were the ideal spots for the conjugal meetings of lovers. The hill of Tirupparankunram was one such ideal nursery of love.

When the lover declares his fidelity to his lady-love and swears by Mount Parankunram, the friend chides him not to take lightly the holy abode of Muruga, as he might suffer adversely for taking a false oath, if perchance he proves unfaithful. The ever faithful wife though vexed at his frequent absence and seeming disloyalty, is anxious to relieve him of the consequence of Muruga's displeasure. In order to alleviate the God's retaliation, she hastens with sandal paste and incense, flowers and fruits and praises Muruga at Parankunram for constancy, prosperity and victory to her lover. In this holy abode are seen many pious worshippers who sing with cymbals and dance to the music of the drum and the lute before the son of Siva and Uma. Thus they supplicate to Muruga in order to gain the ends of human existence in love, war and prosperity.

In the nineteenth song of *Paripadal*, there is reference to the marriage of Muruga to Valli. That the mortals on earth too may experience the bliss of love, as did the gods when He married Devayanai, Muruga made love to Valli and took her as his consort, and pointed the way to human beings to love and be loved. In the early hours of the morning, men and women, young and old, maids and youth wend their way from Madura to Parankunram, a distance of about five miles, for worship with a variety of flowers and garlands of different hues and especially predominating are the flowers with red and crimson colours.

The elephant on whose back is based the seat of the flag-staff, is anointed with oil and red paste and flowers are offered by devotees. Then they taste the balance of the offered food to the elephant which is a symbol of Muruga's vehicle, in order to invoke Muruga's blessing on them. He is praised as the beloved of Valli and his form in the temple is adorned with red garlands and raiments. Even his lance, *Vel*, is golden red; his face and mien are of flaming hue, reminding one of his victory over Surapadman who assumed the form of a mango tree in the midst of the ocean. Thus they worship Him in this radiant setting at the foot of the kadamba tree, in the company of their kith and kin at the Mount of Parankunram. "Be thou gracious to these, thy devotees!" is the essence of their prayer.

In stanzas fourteen and twenty-one, the worshippers beseech the victorious Muruga with six faces to shower his loving grace and to inspire them to do

virtuous acts of charity and love. Above all they extol his glory and pray for greater and more ardent devotion. So efficacious is their worship. In exuberance of love for Muruga, the devotee glides in an elephant walk at the foot of the Holy Mount, to the accompaniment of the drum (Thudi) and the whole landscape in and around the Mount assumes the shape of the elephant, the vehicle of Muruga.

In these poems of *Paripadal*, we get a significant conception of God Muruga and his worship in the classical and golden age of the Tamils in South India. This temple was a place of healthy rivalry which fostered the crafts and arts of the Tamils of the Sangam Age. Varieties of banners were erected on the banks of the temple tanks in Tirupparankunram, which indicated the nature of competitions to be held during the festivals in the temple. (*Paripadal* 6: 14).

The holy atmosphere of Tirupparankunram was a source of enjoyment to the pilgrims. The hill temple of Muruga was a place of ritual worship with incessant sacrificial fires emitting smoke which went up the sky. *Paripadal* describes the odorous smoke of *akil* which was offered to Muruga, rising up in the sky in the form of profuse clouds which screened the sun. Thus the heat of the sun was not felt by the pilgrims who made their trip to the temple in pleasant weather. The sport of the lovers on the way to the hill was so enchanting that they walked ever so slowly, that made the short distance between the hill and the city of Madurai seem never ending. (*Paripadal* 12-14).

God Muruga was a source of endless inspiration for artists in general and sculptors in particular. In Tirupparankunram, there was a painting hall where the flowers of nature were painted life-like. It looked as if it was the chosen armoury of arrows for the God of love, Kāman. The fact that the ancient Tamils patronised the fine arts of painting in the halls of the temples is revealed from the lines of *Paripadal* which dwell on a gallery of fine paintings.

Tirupparankunram was a seat of learning and fine arts. The picture galleries of the temple were a source of knowledge to the pilgrims. Legends and epics depicting the religious and philosophic ideals of the Tamils were painted in the picture gallery. The devotees took delight in seeing the paintings. They derived pleasure in offering explanations on these paintings to one another. Temples were a source of learning and culture which stimulated the aesthetic sense of the people. (*Paripadal* 19: 48-57).

The hill-temple is described with ascending steps, resembling a storeyed palace. (*Paripadal*, 19. 56-57). As described by the critics and historians of Indian religious culture, temples in India represent philosophy in brick and stone and were nurseries for the great development of sculpture, painting, music and dancing.

God Muruga in the temple of Tirupparankunram was worshipped by the Pandyan kings who made periodical visits to this temple with royal paraphernalia. That the temple was given permanent endowment of lands, *Devatānam* by the kings and chieftains

is evident from other sources. It was already noted that the temples were the places of retreat for the people at the time of foreign invasions. So a big army of elephants, horses, chariots, and warriors was provided to the temple. Paripadal refers to the royal patronage to the temples in vivid detail.

The image of five-headed serpent is found under trees invariably in the outer porches of the Hindu temples. The serpent worship in the temples was an ancient custom. Perācīriyar explains in his commentary to Meippattiyal of Tolkappiam, the meaning of the word '*ananku*' indicating 18 kinds of minor deities. *Nagar* or serpent is one among them. There is a popular belief that Muruga manifests himself in the form of serpents to exhibit His grace to his devotees. Paripadal refers to a fearful sight of a five-headed serpent and its tender young one which frightened the young devotees at the temple of Tirupparankunram. It is interesting to note that this fearful sight was later discovered to be a water flower nestling of the hill-pool. Anyhow the imaginary fear suggests the existence of belief in five-headed serpents in the abodes of Muruga.

Temples of Muruga were situated in the hill regions which displayed varieties of flowers. These flowers attracted the maidens of heaven. Nakkirar describes the hill of Tirupparankunram with flower groves which were useful even to the damsels of heaven in their decoration of their beautiful locks. The paintings of the temple were life-like and the natural set up of Parankunram resembled beautiful paintings. An atmosphere of inexplicable fragrance was pervad-

ing the temple. The gentle breeze of the hill temple carried with it the fragrance of the sandal flower-dust of the lovers and the incense burnt to the God by the devotees. An air of odorous incense was always the characteristic of the temple of Tirupparankunram which celebrated unending festivals.

The natural scenery around the temple is portrayed as an opera-house with the sweet melodies of the birds of the hill region. Human life along with the life of nature seemed to vie with each other in worshipping God Muruga in melodies of music. There sounded the melody of the lyre of the musicians against the music of the humming bees. The notes of the flute rivalled with the sweet chirping of the birds; the resonant beating of the drums floated against the rhythmic leap of the water falls. The damsels danced in tune with the creepers that swayed to the gentle north wind; the tune of *pālai* was played by the maids and it evoked the pathetic call of the peacock.

Naccinarkiniyar states in his commentary to *Tolkappiam* that the Sun who brings forth showers and wind is the symbolic deity of the desert-land. Atiyarkkunallar, another commentator of Silappadigaram, mentions that the Sun and *Koṟṟavai* are the symbolic deities of the desert-land. The grammatical treatise of *Tolkappiam* mentions no specific (*Tinai*) land for the desert. The forest and the hilly regions take the form of desert due to the burning sun of the scorching summer. So the regional Gods of these two lands, *Māyon* and *Muruga*, are celebrated in their



other forms of Māyol or the Black Goddess, Kāli. Kāli (Māyol) is the feminine aspect of Māyon and She is the mother-goddess of Cēyon.

In due course God Muruga became the celebrated deity of the other regions also, wherever the people had an encounter with the forces of nature. Even in the river-girt fields where the people put forth their energy in agricultural activities, it was considered that cultivation was an encounter with the forces of nature. The stages of warfare were sometimes compared to the skill of cultivation. The cultivator worshipped the God of eternal energy in the form of Muruga, invoking His grace to bless him with seasonal rains and sufficient resources to encounter the forces of nature. In gratitude, these tillers offered their first yields to God Muruga. So in certain poems, as already referred to, Muruga is celebrated as 'Kadiyum Kadavul' which means, 'the God who feeds on the fresh yields'. Hence his temples were built not only on the mountains but also in other centres where nature was at its best.

The cult of Muruga was not limited to the regions of hills and rivers. In due course legends began to celebrate His exploits on the coastal regions also. He killed the Asura, Surapadman, who took the disguised form of a mango tree beneath the deep sea. So He is celebrated as the warrior-God who won over the ferocious forces of evil even in the turbulent sea. Hence temples were built on the sea-shore for his worship as the temple of Tiruchendur known as Tirucheeralavai. In Kalitokai (104) it is found that Muruga is glorified for His endless energy and robust

personality conceived in red complexion by the people of the forest land, who traditionally worshipped God Māyon as their regional deity.

A blend of concepts of Gods and a fusion of religious cults is noted in the Sangam hymns like *Paripadal*. Māyon's attributes are associated with Muruga, and Muruga's attributes are fused with those of Māyon. (*Paripadal*: 3-37). The shrines were erected for both Muruga and Tirumal in one and the same hill during these times of fusion of religious worship. For example, Cholaimalai is celebrated by both the devotees of Māyon and Muruga, and hymns in praise of both the Gods are found in *Paripadal*. The Sangam Age was conspicuous for its spirit of tolerance and balanced concept of God and worship. The concept of Māyon as the Lord of evolution of the cosmic elements and the concept of the trinity are found in *Paripadal*-13, 14-25. Muruga is described as the Supreme Absolute having in Himself all the elements and aspects of the other Gods. (*Paripadal* 5: 56-70).

According to Tolkappiar in Marapu 91, this world is a synthetic component of five fundamental elements. This world is subject to evolution and involution of these five elements i.e., earth, water, fire, air, and sky. In the process of evolution the first and foremost element which manifests itself is the sky; from the sky evolves the air; from the air evolves fire; from the fire evolves water; from the water earth evolves finally. This process of evolution of the universe is symbolically explained in the legends of the birth of Muruga which are narrated in *Paripadal* and *Tirumurugārrupadai*.

The life-spark (the sperm) of Śiva was left in the hands of the God of air. He could not tolerate the excessive fire of the spark and so it was handed over to God Agni who is the embodiment of fire itself. Unable to bear the scorching heat of the divine spark, Agni left it in the river Ganges. It reached the pool of Saravana. Lastly in order to be tolerated by the earth, the cosmic life-force of Śiva took the form of six children who were nourished by six karttikai maidens, the consorts of the six renowned holy saints. The stages in the manifestation of Muruga explain the evolution of the cosmic life of the universe, through the process of the five fundamental elements.

This world consists of a diversity of stages, physical, material and spiritual. All these aim at perfection and so are subjected to a pilgrimage in order to relieve themselves from the bondage of Karma. God is omnipresent and omnipotent with infinite energy in His absolute nature beyond the grasp of the mortal senses which are only finite in their capacity. The immanence of God assumes forms and manifestations as to be accessible to the human beings. This is clearly conveyed in the poem of Nak-kirar in Tirumurugarruppadai (289). In response to the moving appeals of the devotees, God Muruga takes on the manifestation which is pleasing to the mortals. He then reveals His primal aspects which are eternal fragrance, eternal divinity, eternal youthfulness and eternal beauty. He transforms the world of nature and man by the process of evolution and involution, so that these four aspects of fragrance, divinity, youthfulness and beauty could be kept up eternally fresh. Life and death are valuable boons

awarded by God to the mortals, to keep themselves eternally refreshed in their progress of evolution, which is an endless process.

Muruga's grace is so spontaneous that He is celebrated as the Mother of the universe. (*Paripadal* 14. 29). His eternal grace is also explained in the legends, according to which Muruga is the son of God Siva, who is the embodiment of selfless grace and who swallowed deadly poison in order to save the world.

As evidenced in the poems in *Paripadal*, Muruga is more than a regional deity and the concept of Muruga attains universality. He is considered to be the Lord of the earth. He is the originator and goal of human life.

## KUMARA IN THE TAMIL EPICS

We discover the popularity of the Muruga cult not only in the *Pattuppattu* Idylls and the *Ettutokai* anthologies of the Third Academy but also in the epics like *Jivakachintamani* and *Silappadigaram*. There are many allusions to Muruga in the work of Hiruṭakathevar, a Jain monk and poet, in his great epic dealing with the story of Jivakan. Even though Jainism had taken root in Southern India, the Jain poets were not averse to lauding the Hindu Gods who held hegemony over all other religious creeds during their times. It is a testimony to the universality of Muruga. The author of *Jivakachintamani* portrays the great strength and dynamic courage of his hero Jivakan and compares him to the display of insuperable vigour shown by Muruga when he pierced the Krauncha mount with his shining javelin. Muruga is described as being born on a flowery bed; and Jivakan's birth is compared to it for its auspiciousness. Again in the context of persuading Jivakan to marry Govindai, a reference to the marriage of Muruga to the highland maid Valli is made so as to prove the futility of urging equality of status in the marriage partners.

"The fawn-eyed Valli was wooed by Murugan  
On her merits alone and none other."

Again in the scene where the beautiful damsel Padumai was stung by a cobra, Jivakan revives her from death; their eyes meet and the author describes their falling in love with each other, in the simile of Murugan's victorious javelin: "Her eyes were as effulgent as Murugan's Vel."

In *Silappadigaram* too are many references to the worship of Muruga, and therefore we may infer that in the age of the Third Academy, Muruga worship was popular, widely spread among all classes. There were many towering temples to the six-faced wielder of the lance—*Silappadigaram* 5-170. Besides temples for Muruga, there were also Velkottam, implying thereby that even his weapon—Vel—was singled out for worship and temples were built where the Lance was installed for worship, and Ilanko, the author of *Silappadigaram* who describes these temples, was also of an alien faith and not a Hindu. In this epic, the young bridegroom—Kovilan—is described as a living representation of Muruga's beauty; Kovilan on the other hand praises his love, Kannaki's eyes to the piercing lustre of Muruga's Vel.

The attractive youthful mien of Muruga depicted by Nakkirar in line 265 of *Tirumūrugārrupadai* as  
"the beauteous Murugan swaying the comely  
Vel"

is also indicated by Ilanko in his *Silappadigaram* epic. The lover comes by night to meet his lady-love



and her companion warns him of the danger of his constant visits in the guise of Muruga with the garland of kadamba flowers and swinging his Vel.

“In this part of the country, they would suspect  
Thy form as God Muruga, as you've not six  
faces;

Nor dost thou ride on a peacock, accompanied  
By Valli; Thy shoulders do not extend thy  
arms twelve.

These rural folks cannot perceive God Muruga  
otherwise.

This passage occurs in Kuntrakuravai Section, where it is made plain that Muruga who is worshipped among the more cultured folks with one face and two hands, is worshipped in that particular village by the villagers in His six-faced form with twelve hands and hence the lover who dons the kadamba garland and comes with the lance will not be taken for the Lord Muruga that he has in mind to impersonate and thus prevent people to suspect his true identity.

Here is an important clue to the tradition of the image of Muruga as the God with one face. The fact that the maid insinuates that Lord Muruga worshipped by cultured people had a single face and two hands and would not be recognised by these crude villagers, is itself a proof that the ancient form of worship was later supplanted in consonance with the Puranic period, where Muruga had six faces and twelve hands, in the form of a warrior.

Muruga in the classical poems is depicted as

conferring joy and happiness and he is the guardian of the people who are lovers of nature and who invoke him with music, dance and flower offerings. This worship is peculiar to the Kurinchi land. Love was the main theme of the people who worshipped Muruga. (*Paripadal* 14 and *Silappadigaram* 24, Kunrakuravai). He had demonstrated his love for his consort Devayanai in the conventional form of Love known as *Katpiyal* and his love for Valli in the romantic form of *Kalaviyal*, and in this dual role the Sangam poets extol him (*Paripadal*—Song 9).

In *Silappadigaram*—Manai, Aram 49—Muruga is described as One with six faces. After defeating the asuras, he celebrated his victory by performing in the battle field a *Kudaikuttu*. He crossed the sea and defeated Suran and he took the foamy waves and danced the *Tudikuttu* dance. Mādavi, the paramour of Kovilan, the hero of *Silappadigaram*, is reported to have performed these two dances to delight her lover. *Silappadigaram* describes the temples of Muruga in Sentil, Chengodu and Venkunru. It proves that Muruga worship was well established during the time of Ilanko, the author of *Silappadigaram*, in the third century A.D.

We quote a few verses from Dikshitar's translation of *Silappadigaram* in support of our statement:

The young maids of the Kurava tribe who dwelt in the hills sang in honour of Muruga, so that they might be married.

"This indeed is the spear wielded by the deity  
Who never deserts the renowned Sentil,  
Chengodu, the white hill and Erakam—  
The white, shining, leaf-shaped spear  
Put an end to Sura (in the form of a mango  
tree)

In olden days and chased him to the sea.  
Oh, this is indeed the spear held aloft  
By the matchless deity with six faces  
And twelve arms; this is his shining spear  
Wherewith the God riding on a peacock  
Vanquished the asura enemies and he it was  
Who was celebrated by the celestials.  
Oh, this is indeed the spear adorning  
The lovely hands of Him who was sucked  
By six mothers in the lotus bed of Saravanai  
pool.

This is the spear that pierced the Krauncha  
mount  
After cleaving the breast of the asura  
Who had that hill for his residence."

Translation of Silappadigaram: Dikshitar—

Pages 272-278.

Archaeology and iconography lend support to the evidence of Muruga worship revealed in the epic poem of Silappadigaram written by Ilanko, a Jain monk. In the village of Tirumalai in the Ramanathapuram district of South India is a Śiva temple. In the Devakottam, in front of the Garbhagraham is a form of Kumaraswami. His left hand is poised on

his raised left thigh while the right hand is seen resting on the right thigh. Near this figure is seen a Bhutam, holding the staff of an umbrella. Evidently this is the Lord performing the Kudaikuttu (umbrella dance) which has been described in Silappadigaram 22-52-53.

"He danced the tudi dance (drum) in the midst of the sea, which itself served as the dancing Hall, following the destruction of the demon Sura who hid himself there, and the Kudai dance, lowering the umbrella before the asuras who gave up their arms in great distress." Dikshitar's Translation of Silappadigaram, Pages 124-125.

## THE SAIVA AGAMAS AND KUMARA TANTRA

The Saiva Agamas are texts which deal with experience and spiritual rituals that lead to the goal of realisation. They expound the conceptions of God and the practice of religious beliefs of South India. The cult of Muruga worship occurs in Kamikam, Karanam, Suprabhedam, Kumara Tantra and Amsumatbheda Agamas. In Suprabhedam, Umadevi also called Dakshayani, the daughter of Dakshan, wants to get rid of her birth by yogic powers. She takes on a new form as the daughter of Himavan and does 'tapasya', penance in order to attain Śiva as her partner. On the intercession of the Devas, Śiva and Sakti were united: when the Asuras oppressed the Devas, they went to the Lord at Kailas and beseeched him to grant the grace of a son, who would command their forces and win them a victory.

In order to fulfil their supplication the Lord willed that his 'Tejas' should be borne by Agni or Fire and left at the Saravanai lake. There the Lord Muruga appeared and was nourished by Karttikai maidens. It is said that Muruga is but an infinitesimal fraction of the power of Adisakti, the Divine Mother.

In this Agama is also described the process of erecting a temple for Muruga—One-faced or six-faced, with two hands or twelve hands—to be constructed in stone, sand or wood. In the Amsumat-bheda Agama is described the weapons Muruga carries in each of his hands and the significance of each is also explained. "In the Agama 118, we have the God Muruga shining in the little village on the sides of the high hill where the rivulet sounds. The men wear clusters of *Vengai* flowers dripping with honey and along with their women dance in the streets keeping time with *Tondaga* drum". (A. K. Chatterjee in *The Cult of Skanda-Karttikeya in Ancient India*, p. 64).

In Uthara Kamikam, is described the places where Muruga temples can be erected, as in close proximity to Siva temples, on mountainous tops, near the river banks, or hilly dales and under big shady trees. Temples consecrated to Muruga can be from three cubic feet to three hundred cubic feet in extent; the Garbhagraham, the Mandapas and Prakarams, the Chariots and sculptured flag staff and his weapons with their peculiar posed hands supporting them are expounded in great detail. Except in forests and hills where Muruga may be in the form of an ascetic with loin cloth (*Kaupinam*) as Jnana-skanda, the inhabited places and towns must consecrate the idol of Muruga with six faces and two Devis.

The *Kumara Tantra* was looked upon as a branch of the Saiva Tantras and Skanda was invested with some of the attributes usually associated with Siva. *Kumara Tantra* deals with the worship of



Muruga. The rituals, temples, installation of images and icons, ceremonies, festivals, fasts, initiation rites are all depicted in great detail. The mystic (Yantra) and the secret (Mantra) cults, the different forms of images, rituals and yearly festivals and processions are also expounded. The Divine Child was extolled as the Mahayogin, the great Teacher, the great Healer, and the Lord of the Bhutas.

Muruga's birth is assigned to the month of April in the Purva Paksha full moon—He became one form on the Panchami day and on Sashti (sixth) day, he was initiated as the commander of the armed forces of the Devas, Deva Senapathi. On this day, Indra bestowed his daughter, Devayanai. Vishnu endowed him with weapons; Kubera gave him ten millions of Yakshas; Agni gave him effulgence, and Vayu gave him the chariot; Devadatta gave him the hen and other Devas gave him abundant gifts and attendants. They prostrated and worshipped him. He desired to please them by giving them whatever they wanted.

The Devas with one accord proclaimed that he should conquer their inveterate foe, the leader of the Asuras, Taraka, Iranya and Ukkira and save them. He acceded to their behest and called Chakran and deputed him as the envoy to go and persuade Taraka to release the Devas from their bondage to him. This was refused and so began the war. Taraka ridiculed the child coming to wage war with him but Kumara assured him that he could conquer him even as the few letters of a powerful mantram can quell mighty forces. There was fierce battle when the Asura king

lost all his armies and stood helpless and exercising the subtle strategem, he hid in the mountain of Krauncha. But Muruga penetrated this mount and destroyed him. The Devas praised him and worshipped him.

Thus in *Kumara Tantra* is described the images of several aspects of this God viz., 1. Saktidhara. 2. Skanda. 3. Senapati. 4. Subrahmanya. 5. Gajavahana. 6. Saravanabhava. 7. Karttikeya. 8. Kumara. 9. Shanmukha. 10. Tarakari. 11. Senani. 12. Brahmasasta. 13. Valli Kalyanasundaramurti. 14. Balasvamin. 15. Sikhivahana. The images of the different aspects of Muruga have been described in detail by Gopinath Rao in his *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, and as found in the *Kumara Tantra* text. Saktidhara for example, according to *Kumara Tantra* (2nd Patala) should be represented with one head and two hands. The attribute of the left arm is vajra and that of the right is sakti. "This description" says Dr. A. S. Chatterjee in the chapter on Iconography (p. 127) "is somewhat different from those recorded in the North Indian texts about two-armed Karttikeya. According to the poet of the *Kumara Tantra*, Sakti (Vel) represents will, knowledge and action." Thus we see that *Kumara Tantra* took shape to elucidate the various symbols of Muruga by giving esoteric meanings.

The earliest known Subrahmanya image from South India comes from Nagarjunakonda. The image belongs to the period of the Ikshvakus i.e., 3rd-4th century A.D. It is a two-armed image in standing pose—in the *Samabhanga* mudra with the left hand

holding a cock. The head has been damaged. The broken right hand probably held *sakti*. In Tirunelvely at Adichanallur are found bronze cock, iron vel and a gold mouth-cover which is used by those who take the Kavadi to tie their mouths. This practice of tying the mouth when performing the worship of Muruga is to this day witnessed in Kathirgamam. In Mahabalipuram is an image of Muruga riding on an elephant, his right hand holding the *angusam* and his left hand in the *Katyavalambita* pose (resting on the hip). This figure agrees with the description given by Nakkirar in the poem *Tirumurugārrupadai*—109-110.

It is generally accepted that Skanda enjoyed great popularity in the period of the Pallavas. He appears in the seventh century Somaskanda sculptures of Śiva and a large number of such sculptures are found in Mahabalipuram. This conception of Somaskanda form was praised by Nakkirar, T.M.G. 256-257. The mutilated image of Bala Subrahmanya, belonging to the early Chola period, is one of the oldest representations of the God in the far south T.I.H. Vol. XXXI, p. 247. The image is found in the Bala Subrahmanya temple, constructed during the reign of Rajakesari, identified with Aditya Chola (A.D. 871-909). One of his hands is in the gesture of communicating wisdom. Another hand holds a rosary and a third bears the weapon *sakti*. The attribute of the fourth hand cannot be deciphered. It is the earliest dated *Karrali* or temple built with stone from the base to the top. At each of the four corners of the roof over the sanctum of this temple is an elephant, which is one of the vehicles of this God.

In Anaimalai off Madurai, in the Narasimhan cave is a Muruga temple. It belongs to the 9th century A.D. Here Muruga is with Valli. In the porch are two pillars, one holding the cock and the other has the peacock on the top, signifying the banners of Muruga (Tirumurugārrupadai 38). In all these various forms prescribed in the Agamas and Tantras, Muruga-Kumara was worshipped by the South Indian people, to whom Muruga had become a national God. See K. Arunachala Gounder's article on *Muruga worship in the South*, in the M.D.T. Hindu College Magazine—Silver Jubilee Number, 1966.

## THE SAIVA TIRUMURAIIS AND MURUGA

In the twelve Tirumurais which are the collections of sacred songs of the Saivites, generally the Supreme Lord Śiva is only extolled, and the Mother aspect and son aspect of Ganapathy and Muruga become incorporated in the psalms of praise to Śiva. In the three *Tirumurais* of St. Sambandar, there are about ten references to Muruga. In Tirumuthukuntraï the young damsels dwell on the divine attributes of the Lord who is the Deity of the Kurinchi hills. Muruga is depicted in Sambandar's Devarams as "the rider on the peacock," and, as "the valiant son who vanquished the deluding asuras", "the son of Śiva who destroyed the deluding evil forces of Surapadman" and again as "the darling of Valli." "He is the young regal son", and Sambandar extols his divinity and valour. The idea of the son of Śiva receives emphasis. He is called 'Kumaravel' and 'Kandan' as well, by the child poet who himself was looked upon as a manifestation of Muruga, according to the Poet Oddakuttar.

St. Tirunavakarasu extols Muruga in the famous canto where he dispels the gloom of Aputhiadigal when he cures his son from the deadly snake bite.

He praises Śiva "whose son is endowed with six faces". "He has for his son the roseate redhued Seynthan". "He is the lover of Valli who symbolises the power to love and be loved", and this divine child Velavan is dear to the father, Lord Śiva. He is the Father of the child who dons the kadamba garland and in these ways the fatherhood of Śiva is extolled by St. Appar in many a holy hymn. In the canticle on Mount Kailas, he praises Śiva as the Father whose son overcame the dreaded Surapadman, with his victorious lance; "when a devotee meditates intensely, there will He appear with twelve hands."

The concept of Muruga—His exploits with the Asura Surapadman, and as the wielder of the trident Vel, the son who is born in Saravana Pond and who is endowed with twelve hands—is delineated consistently with the traditional worship of Muruga. "The one who sways the banner of the cock, the beloved of Valli—He it is who is the Son of Śiva."

St. Sundarar likewise alludes to Muruga's valour and praises Śiva as the Saviour who sent his son to wipe out evil forces. "The Lord Śiva bestowed His benign grace by willing that His son should slay the evil power called Tarakan."

Again St. Sundarar pays a tribute to Valli as the daughter-in-law of Śiva, she who is the daughter of the Kurava chief. The focus is here riveted on Valli. Again young Kumaran is the brother of the favoured Devas, and the son of the kingly Śiva who blesses his union with the gypsy girl, Valli. In all these references, Muruga is thus associated closely as the son of the Supreme Śiva, who is acclaimed by



these saints, who valiantly sought to establish the supremacy of Saivism over the overpowering impact of Jainism and Buddhism.

In Tirupotsunnam and Tiruvunthiyar, St. Manikavasagar speaks of Śiva as the "Father of the goodly Vēlan, or the father of Kumaran." Muruga is referred to as the son of Malaimahal—Uma, the lord of the heavenly hosts, Kumaravel, and as the beloved of Valli. Muruga is mentioned as King (Venthan) and Senthana; He is the nephew of Vishnu, and the rider on the graceful peacock. He is the young idol of Ganga, the younger brother of Ganapathy. We see St. Manikavasagar dwelling on the many-sided relationship of the Supreme Lord with the hierarchy of sons and brothers and uncles and spouses. Murugavel's form is delineated with six ambrosial faces which shed lustrous light from the twelve eyes.

The despondent Devas who came under the sway of the Asuras complained to Śiva of their plight and He willed that his six-faced son should be assigned the task of conquering the foes—"Oh Thou Six faced One with coral countenance! Do thou vanquish the foes of the Devas and come with astounding victory". That was the order of Śiva to Muruga. This narration occurs in the 10th Tirumurai, termed *Tirumantram*. There is reference to the Supreme Śivam assuming six faces and the mingling of Kandan in Swami and known as "Kandaswamy", also termed as Śiva's Son.

In the eleventh Tirumurai, in *Tirukailaya Jnavula* is a reference to Muruga, by Cheraman Perumal, where Muruga is depicted as the proud Com-

mander of the armed forces, who in his prowess as leader, leads them, riding on a peacock.

Nakkirar in Potri Tirumali Venba describes Muruga as the Commander (Senapati) who rides regally on the peacock at the behest of the Devas and overthrows the crowned sceptre of the Asuras. Muruga here is the overlord of the heavenly host.

In Tiruvidai Maruthur Mummani Kovai is an allusion to the mighty potency of Muruga's 'Vel' which crushed even impervious mountains. Lord Śiva is the father of such a valiant son. In *Periyapurānam* occur many references to the worship of Muruga, whose valour is extolled in manifold ways:

"Riding on the swift peacock, he cleft asunder the foes"....

"He is the wielder of the victorious lance"....

"The roseate lance of Murugavel"....

"He is the Velavan who tossed mountains"....

"The hero who overcame the forces of evil and saved the Devas."

Muruga gives succour to those who call on him: "Oh Muruga—Art thou the one who heeds our cry, whenever we call upon Thee."

Besides these references there are about eight stanzas where Ganapathy and Kanda are associated in the praises offered to Lord Śiva. Here we find emphasised the identity of Śiva with Muruga and Muruga with Śiva.

Thus in the sacred songs of the Saiva saints, Muruga's attributes are all brought out, and he is endearingly associated as the invincible son of Śiva—"the light of wisdom."

## THE CONCEPT OF MURUGA IN KANDAPURANAM

The Sanskrit epic *Skanda Purana*, which is said to contain a hundred thousand stanzas, has no existence in a collective form. Fragments in the shape of Samhitas, Khandas, Mahatmyas are found in various parts of India. The Tamil epic poem *Kandapuranam* by Kachiappa Swami of Kanchi is said to be based on the first six Khandas of the *Sivarahasya Khandas*, the first of twelve sections of the *Sankara Mahatmya* of the Sanskrit epic and is a work of high literary merit. It is a prolific work in Tamil where the history of Muruga's birth and exploits and his worship are delineated in lucid poetry with exquisite poetic embellishments and with high spiritual significance. It is an epic into which is woven not only the divine acts of Muruga but also the culture of the Tamils. J. M. Nallaswamipillai in his study on *Tirumurugārrupadai* states that it is the weightiest of the puranas and its date can be fixed as far back as the twelfth century A.D. (*The Light of Truth—Siddhanta Deepika* 1912. XII. 407. 522).

Śiva is *Sat* (existence). He pervades everywhere. Uma is *Chit* (knowledge). Skanda is *Ananda*

(bliss). The three together constitute Satchithananda, which is existence-knowledge-and-bliss-absolute. Truth is bliss. Wisdom is bliss. Without truth and wisdom, there cannot be any bliss. Thus these three are co-existent and inseparable attributes of the Supreme Godhead. (Skanda cult in South India by K. R. Venkataraman—Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, Revised).

When the divine wisdom which is divine grace is separated from Paraparam, it becomes Mother. When truth and wisdom commingle, anandam is born. The anandam which is full of wisdom is an aspect of Sakti from whom Muruga emanates. In *Kandapurānam* is a fine stanza which portrays Muruga's genesis. "Form he was and yet without form; ancient, many, and yet One Supreme Brahman. His was the blessed countenance of flaming radiance; his faces six and arms twelve radiate grace. In this way beauteous Muruga manifests himself to save the world." It is clear that Muruga was regarded in the Tamil tradition as a symbol of light (Jyothi).

In the *Sambava kanda*, we find Śiva recounting to Uma, that Murugan is none other than Śiva and Sakti.

"I bear five faces and carry out the five-fold acts.

I am Sadasivam. Though you are manifested  
In many forms, you bear one face,

Oh Parasakti.

Muruga conjoins your face and mine:

We are he."

In Saravanai's waters, Uma embraced with both arms the child with six forms and lifted him. Thus she made his six comely faces and twice six shoulders into one form. She is the mistress of the triple world, the Mother of Kumara.

"As the diverse energies of the father, at the involution of all things become one as before, so the many forms of Gowri's son became one and he received the name Kandan". (Studies and Translations by Sir P. Arunachalam).

### *A Synopsis of the Story of Kanda*

#### *The 'Tapas'—penance of Uma Devi:*

In Tirukailas Mount, the abode of Śiva and Devi, Uma asked Śiva to eradicate her name of Dakshayāni, as it was derived from her father Dakshan, whose daughter she was and who had ignored Śiva in his great sacrifice. Śiva acceded to her request and said that the king of Himayam was doing penance to get her as daughter and to have him as his son-in-law. So he would come and marry her. She would then be known as Parvathi. This pledge was fulfilled and when Uma was five years old, she announced her wish to marry Śiva, and she desired to do penance in order to accomplish her aim. Noting her young age, the parents forbade her to do so. However, she persisted and in Gowri Kundam, she set up her Hall of meditation and performed her penances.

During this time, Śiva taught in silence the four Rishis—Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana and Sanat-kumar under the banyan tree, in Dakshinamurthi

form. He held the hand in *chinmudra* and taught them in silence all the inner wisdom of the Agamas and Vedas. In this ascetic state of Śiva, the whole creation moaned the lack of fruitfulness, enjoyment and bhoga and complained to the Gods. Meanwhile Surapadman was committing atrocities and Indra and the Gods took up the complaint to the Lord at Mount Kailas. But they could not gain admission as Nandi Deva stopped them at the entrance. So they went to Vaikunta to Lord Narayana and he said that unless Śiva married Uma, the symbol of Ādisakti, there would be no prosperity on earth.

So Brahma returned to his realm and his brother Manmatha undertook to effect the change in Śiva at the behest of the Gods. Here follows the episode of Manmatha's tempting of Śiva and his being burnt to ashes. Rathi's request to save her husband is granted that only to her would his form be seen and to none other. Having granted Sivajnanam to his four Rishis, the Lord in the guise of an old brahmin went to see the penance of Parvathi and being pleased with her devotion promised to marry her.

On Panguni Uttaram day, the Lord and Parvathi were wedded and the universe was immersed in bliss. The Lord sent forth sparks of light from his five faces and the face of Grace and they spread forth. He bade Vayu and Agni Devas to take these sparks to the Saravanai pond, and there appeared six faces and twelve hands and thus came forth Muruga. The six *Karttikai* maidens nurtured him.



From the anklets of Parvathi when she hastened to protect herself against the sparks that radiated from the Lord Śiva, there came forth nine Saktis from the nine gems, and they brought forth the nine heroes of whom Veerabahu was the chief. The others were Veerakēsari, Veeramahendra, Veeramaheswar, Veerapuranthar, Veerarākathar, Veerāmārthandar, Veerānthagar and Veeradheerar. The Lord granted them appropriate weapons and along with the million bodyguard asked them to be the attendants on Muruga.

When Parvathi Devi saw Muruga in the pond, she embraced the six forms which became one and that was known as *Kanda*. Uma Devi fed him with her milk, with Muruga seated in between the mother and father, on the bull chariot; and this came to be known as the *Somaskanda Muhurtham*. Śiva blessed the *Karttikai* maidens who had nurtured Muruga as a babe and said that those who worship Muruga in the month of *Karttikai* will get what they desire.

Muruga performed many a leela while at Kailas. To the request of Indra to redeem the Devas from the sway of the Asuras, Muruga agreed to be their Commander and Indra built a temple at *Kandavetpu* and worshipped him.

Brahma would not prostrate before the child Muruga when he went up to Kailas, and when asked to explain what was meant by *Pranavam*, he could not elucidate it and so was kept in *Kandavetpu* as a prisoner. Then at the request of Tirumal, Śiva appeared before Muruga and asked him to explain

what Pranavam meant and he whispered into the ears of Śiva, the full import of Pranavam. Gladdened, Śiva went to Kailas and Brahma was eventually redeemed. The two daughters of Tirumal—Sundaravalli and Amritavalli begged Muruga to marry them. He asked them to go as daughter of Indra and as Siva-muni's daughter of a Vedha saying that after fulfilling his promise of redeeming the Devas, he would marry them.

When the Gods beseeched Śiva to save them from the tyranny of the Asuras, Śiva bade his son Muruga to redeem them. He endowed him with invincible power as well as the armed might of valiant Boothas and Ganas. The younger brother of Surapadman was Tārakan, the son of Māyai who lived at Krauncha Mount. The nine warriors of Muruga fought with him and were defeated and Veerabahu was imprisoned in the above Mount. So Muruga armed with his Sakti Vel fought with him and won. Tārakan was killed at Māyapuri, his capital. His son Asurenthiran complained to Suran at Veeramahendram. So Suran boasted that he would conquer the six day old child. He was persuaded by his ministers not to go in person but to send his warriors to fight and test Muruga's strength.

Meanwhile, Muruga left his city of Devagiri in the Himalayas, passed Tirukēdar, Benares, Kālathi, Tiruvēnkadam, Chidambaram, Tirupparankunram, and came to Tiruchendur. There he made the necessary preparations to battle against Surapadman and made a survey of his territory.

Surapadman was the son of Māyai and Kasyapar and his brothers were Singamugan and Tarakan and he had immense forces of Asuras at his command. Suran obeying the dictates of his mother Māyai to amass riches and power and to oust the Devas, undertook a big sacrifice at Uttara-Guru, where he offered himself as the offering in the altar fire. However, he was restored to life and he obtained the boon to wield sovereign sway over all beings in the universe. His Guru Sukracharya encouraged his arrogant leadership and Suran thus overpowered all the Devas, and held sway over the kingdoms of Kubera, Indra, Agni, and Tirumal. He built Veeramahendram as his capital city, surrounded by Emapuram, Imayapuram, Lankapuram, Neelapuram, Swethapuram, Vamapuram and Padmapuram. He married Padma Komalai, daughter of Devathatchan. He had Panugopan, Agni-mugan, Iranyan, and Vajrabahu as sons. His sister was Asamuki. Indra was in hiding at Seerkali and finally all the vanquished Devas decided to go to Śiva and complain of the tyranny of Suran. In the meantime Asamuki attempted to kidnap Indra from Seerkali, and had her hand chopped by Mahākālar.

When the forces of evil were at their height, then Muruga sent his prime warrior Veerabahu to Suran on a goodwill mission, but he was humiliated and sent back with the reply that Suran would never liberate the Devas. Veerabahu came to Tiruchendur and reported his reception and said that except his brother Singamugan who was hesitant about waging war with Muruga, all the others were encouraging Suran to oppose Muruga.

Thus it came that the two forces arrayed themselves to oppose each other and they fought bitterly. On the first day was the fight with Panugopan. The nine warriors under the leadership of Veerabahu fought fiercely and defeated Suran's son. The battle waged on day by day with increasing ferocity and valour, and Suran lost one by one his sons and brothers. Yet he was adamant not to yield to the power and might of Muruga and his Vētpadai. Muruga indicated that he was Sivakumar, but the vanquished Suran would not acknowledge his might nor the strength of the Boothas. Then came Panugopan, Iranyan, Agnimugan and his thousand sons. Finally Suran's Chief Minister, Dharmagopan, dissuaded him from going to battle, but it was of no avail. His heart had become hardened, and Surapadman was determined to fight to the bitter end.

It is a magnificent tale to read—the story of the marathon war between Muruga and Suran, when both the forces were matched by supernatural weapons and armies. Muruga's invincible weapons were all used to bring down the vanity and arrogance of Suran who found himself vanquished. Then Muruga stretched out his hand of mercy and beckoned him to seek refuge at his feet, as Suran stood alone in his chariot. It had no effect on the hardened asura. They fought in the air, nether regions, mid regions of the Universe, in fire and water. Finally the asura king resorted to invisible forces and by causing delusion upon delusion, he caused havoc among the Boothas forces of Muruga.

By illusive effort Suran transformed himself into a bird of prey (Chakravāha). Then he assumed the forms of the Devas and carried on the battle, but all these were of no avail. When all efforts failed Muruga beheld him standing alone and he took pity on him and showed him the *Visvarupa darshan* and the way to get rid of his ignorance. Undeterred, Suran became a mango tree in mid-ocean and it was here that the Vēl of Muruga destroyed the tree. Suran's cleft body became the peacock and cock. Finally, Suran perceived Muruga's greatness and on his intercession, Muruga made the cock as his banner and the peacock as his chariot.

Thus the Devas were liberated from the oppression of the asuras and Muruga destroyed their city of Mahendra Puri by deluge, and he came over to Tiruchendur and dwelt there. Tiruchendur came to be known as Jayantipuram. From here he went to Tirupparankunram and married Devayanai and took her to Kandavetpu in Mount Kailas.

#### *Valliammai's Marriage:*

In Thondai Nadu, is a town called Metpadi and near it is Vallimalai. It was ruled by 'Nambi' of the Vedha tribe. He had many sons but no daughters. He prayed to Muruga to give him a daughter. In that hillside was a Siva Yogi who did tapas to Lord Siva. A young female deer used to come and play and frolic in front of him. The muni became infatuated by its beauty and by his longing was able to make the deer conceive. The daughter of Tirumal named Sundari who was yearning to attain Muruga

came into the womb of the deer and was born in the yam bed as a lovely human child.

Nambi and his wife came by that side and saw the child and took it home and as she was found in the yam bed, she was named *Valli*. She grew up with them, and according to their custom Nambi allowed *Valli* to guard the fields of millet. During that time, *Muruga* remembered at *Kandavetpu* the promise he had given *Sundari* and came down to *Vallimalai* and from *Narada Muni* heard about the whereabouts of *Valli* and of her beauty. He came as a hunter carrying bow and arrow and *Vel*, and courted *Valli*. When *Nambi* passed the fields, *Muruga* became a *Vengai* tree. Thus was *Muruga* by her side.

Once when the *Vedhas* came to the field, *Muruga* became an old brahmin and disguised himself. *Valli* would give him honey and millet flour and beyond the seven hills was a spring from where they quenched the thirst. When *Muruga* was rebuffed by *Valli* in the pursuit of his love, *Muruga* thought of his brother *Vinayagar*, who came in the guise of an elephant and frightened her. In order to save herself from the fury of the elephant, the terrified *Valli* ran to the old man to protect her and thereupon he showed her his true form. Then *Muruga* and *Valli* were married according to the rites of the *Vedhas* and she became his consort and was taken to *Kandavetpu*.

In Ceylon, the Tamils are bound to him by special ties. *Muruga* led his hosts to Lanka and destroyed the titanic forces of *Surapadman* and appeas-



ed the local tribes by marrying Valli in Kadiramalai, now known as Kathirgamam. Siva's inherent energy is esoterically represented as his twin consorts. Devayanai is referred to as the energy of action (Kriya Sakti) and Valli as the energy of desire (Iccha Sakti). "Though himself free from all desire, he designed to set the world a pattern of love and felicity"—Sir Pon Arunchalam in "Studies and Translations."

*Kandapuranam—Its Esoteric Meaning:*

The souls evolve through various births, and by penance and prayer, purity and conduct are drawn to the light of divinity. Inherently they partake of the light and power of Sivam. However those souls that lean on the deluding joys of the world will be led by the five senses and forget their heritage. They become a prey to lust, desire and egoism. The interaction of souls on the deluding joys of the world and the consequent pangs of pain and suffering and their insecurity while gloating on false pedestals of power, are brought out in the Section of Mayapadalam and Asurapadalam in Kandapuranam. Sage Kasyapar's union with Mayai of the asuric tribe deluded him from his true goal; he deviated from the path of righteousness and gave birth to a thousand sons who were endowed with asuric tendencies, of whom the chief was Surapadman.

*Surapadman*, the mightiest of the asuras, is the embodiment of Anavam or Egoism. *Singamugan* is the embodiment of Kanmamalam, the effect of deluding actions. *Tārakan* represents Mayamalam, the net work of illusion. *Asamuki* beguiles her bro-

ther of Indrani's beauty and makes Surapadman fall into the trap of fleeting desire; she represents the veiling power called *Tirothayimalam*. The Lord enables the souls to experience according to their innate dispositions—subjecting them to what is predominant in their personality, and under this limitation, they act till they are drawn step by step to the light of God.

The *Yāgapadalam* and *Varamperupadalam* in the story prove this fact. The unrighteous and unholy people can only be known and understood by the same class of people; so also those who are under the influence of delusive forces will be tutored by a teacher, who is himself under the effect of delusion. This is what is illustrated from Sukiran's *Upadesapadalam* and Māyai's *Upadesapadalam*.

The Lord's immanence moves through the Sudha, Asuddha and Prakriti firmaments of the objective world, and directs the souls to live and act according to the effect of their deeds and enjoy the fruits of their deeds. This is stated in *Andakōsapadalam*. Under the impact of the threefold bondage of Anava, Kanma and Māyai, the bound and unliberated souls are impregnated with desires, the love for power unlimited, and ambition to rule the world by force and might. They become so inordinately selfish that they are oblivious to the pain caused to others in the process of their enjoyment. They commit acts harmful to others in their effort to increase their zest for enjoyment, and this is vividly illustrated in the sections on *Digvijaya* and *Devaēval padalams*.

The poisonous snake will produce only poisonous snakes; and likewise, those who are steeped in deluding activities in the world can only give birth to a progeny of the same calibre. Thus the cycle of evil is perpetuated and predominates over the elements of righteousness. This is brought out in the *Krauncha* and *Asamuki padalams*. Those who violate the eternal principles and entities of the Divine Absolute Reality, will have to suffer the consequences of their ignorance and deviation from the Truth. Hence they tread the path of suffering which their actions have merited, and step by step retrace their way to liberation. This is illustrated in the chapters which describe the oppression of the Devas, the overlordship of the Asuric Leaders, and the moving section on the exile and bondage of Indra's son.

The Devas suffered such iniquities as a result of their lack of vigilance and surfeit of enjoyments, and they had thus to pay a high price for their waywardness at the hands of the asuras. When the root cause of suffering which is the result of the work of Ego is known and extirpated, either by fear or through love, when souls turn to the light of God, then God will in turn shower His Grace. He will guide such souls through proper channels and discourses and from within. Those souls that cannot be so drawn will have to suffer progressively affliction of body and mind, and servitude at all levels and by proper remedial treatment, cure themselves of their pain and limitations.

Such is the work of the veiling grace of God and in the story of Kayāmugan and Sadāmugan, we deci-

pher these truths. Ānavam or the power of the I-ness in man needs to be subdued from its active play on the deluding material planes of consciousness, and sublimated by the purification of the senses which are the avenues of experiences. The first step is to make impotent the effect of Mayāmalam and this is seen in the subjugation of Tārakan, the mighty brother of Surapadman.

It is only through the power of discrimination and awareness of delusion, that one can overcome these subtle delusive forces and sublimate the Ego as shown in the *Mahendra Padalam*. Para Sivam wills to save the bound souls from their ignorance; the souls have their experiences in the spheres of the senses, and while steeped in such limitations of the world and its enjoyments, the Lord's grace begins to operate little by little. This is in evidence in the *Kumarapuri padalam* and *Tiruchendur padalam*. "If there is the grace of God, then the atom will become magnified as the cosmos, and the cosmos will dwindle into an atom". The invincible power of Grace can turn in a moment the microcosm into macrocosm as was seen in the insuperable acts of Muruga and his doughty warriors in their titanic conflict with the stupendous forces of the all-powerful asuras. That souls can do impossible acts with the guidance of grace is shown in the achievements of the invulnerable hero Veerabāhu at Mahendrapura, the citadel of the asuras, in the chapters on *Veerabahu-Mahendra padalam* and *Nagarpuhu padalam*.

The Vigjnana Kalar—souls which have evolved from the bondage of deeds and delusion live, move,

and have their being in the realm of purity, *Suddha-maya*, and accordingly experience the fruit of their involvement in the objective spheres. Even though they act, their actions do not bind them. Their detached actions are motivated by the goal of selfless work—service to Siva—and having that as their supreme goal, they conform to the Supreme Will of the Lord. Thus when they mete out punishment to those who are opposed to the righteous and enlighten the contrite who have swerved from the path, or grant boons to those who have been faithful to the Lord, they carry out His Will. This is brought out in the Section where Veerabahu consoles Sayanthan, the son of Indra, in his imprisonment and dire distress.

Where the Ego is not subjugated, where the voice or the guidance of the Guru is not heard or obeyed, where lust and anger generate evil deeds, there will be endless misery. This is evidenced in the story of Veerabahu who in the role of a Guru taught the greatness of Lord Muruga, and brought out the evil potency of Surapadman who typified the human soul under the thralldom of ignorance and bondage. That the soul, when helpless under the sway of the senses is only capable of ignoble deeds, and in that state, ignoble ministers can lead it to the path of destruction, is proved by the reaction of Surapadman who was influenced by his ministers, and sons and brothers, to wage war against the force of wisdom in Muruga. In this context, it is significant to note the advice of Singamugan, who as the embodiment of "Kanma Malam", dissuaded Surapadman from fighting against Muruga, as this deed may react in evil

deeds. Anything good perpetuates good, was his advice.

In the whole of the "War Section"—*Yuddakan-dam*—we see the boundless, sustaining, unfailing love, grace and wisdom of the Lord, who effects the liberating impact on the souls, by weakening the potency of the Ego by countless defeats in actions, and by limiting the restless reactions of the elements and senses in their visible and invisible forms, and in the objective and subjective realms. Thereby we see stage by stage the process of the subjection of the power of Ego, as well as the growing impact of the light of Sivam in the inner self of man.

The soul continually acts and reacts on the existential stage, and revolves through the effect of deeds, till the strength of the threefold bondage is made weak and impotent; the illumination of the light of Sivam penetrates the soul which becomes impregnated with Sivam's Jyothi and Wisdom. That the souls may rise higher in their ascent to God-Realisation, the Lord resides in holy sanctuaries so that He may be sought after by devotees. He manifests Himself in formless state or with form and grants them boons. This is seen in the *Devakāndam* and *Dakshakāndam* sections of *Kandapurānam*.

The Lord appears as Guru to the human souls and grants them His Grace. This is brought out in the story of Valli. Valli, who is of divine origin, is brought up amidst the tribe of the Vedhas, and she represents the human soul. The soul is brought up in the environment of the Vedhas and she is deluded



to think that she belongs to the Vedhas, whereas in reality, she belongs to the divine class. The soul does not know its inheritance and in order to turn the soul to its destiny, the Lord in the manifested form of Muruga, takes the form of a brahmin and shows his true form to her and *makes her his own*. This is the true meaning of the marriage of Valli with Muruga. The soul is immersed in eternal bliss. The whole of Kandapuram is thus steeped in the philosophy of Saiva Siddhantam.

We shall conclude this section by quoting the famous vision of Muruga as delineated by the Poet Nakkirar in the Tirucheeralavai Section of his immortal poem, *Tirumurugārrupadai*:

“In the minds of sages who with unfaltering devotion follow their own life, visions arise of His glorious faces: one face spreadeth afar rays of light, perfectly lighting the world's dense darkness; one face with gracious love seeking, granteth the prayers of his beloved devotees; one face watcheth over the sacrificial rites of the peaceful ones who fail not in the way of the Scriptures; one face searcheth and pleasantly expoundeth hidden meanings, illumining every quarter like the moon; one face with wrath, wipeth away his foes and celebrateth the battle sacrifice; one face dwelleth smiling with slender-waisted Vedda maid, pure-hearted Valli”.

## REVALUATION

Thus we see that the position of Muruga in South India and Sri Lanka reached its climax in the period of the publication of Kachiappa Sivachariyar's *Kandapurānam*. Various aspects of Muruga and his cult which had their origin earlier, are seen in *Kandapurānam*, further elaborated and elucidated. The evidence gleaned from this *magnum opus* is of vast dimensions, in which several strands are mingled in the exaltation of this God. In the *Kandapurānam*, we find a restatement in puranic elaboration in the light of philosophical and yogic disciplines, explaining esoterically the many-sided facets and divergent cult congruities in the worship of Muruga. It became in the South the common and standardised version of the story of Muruga-Kumāra.

His exploits became part of the mythical motif of the conflict between the forces of the Devas and the Asuras, the ceaseless combat between the array of light and darkness, between the righteous and unrighteous elements of existence. In the scheme of the perennial clash between the two opposite principles of good and evil, the titans are depicted as possessing invincible powers and colossal violence, which psychic energy

they had accumulated through a severe regimentation of ascetic and yogic disciplines. In the height of their dynamic strength, they started menacing their opponents, the Devas, who were given to sloth and indulgence. In the Mahabharata version, the name of the demon was Mahishasura, and it was changed in the Puranic age to Tarakasura, and in Kandapurānam, the Asura came to be known as Surapadman.

Whatever the variation, the manifestation of the Divine Child, Muruga-Kumāra, was justified as the ultimate triumph of Good over Evil. The testimony of an overall recognition given to Muruga in Kandapurānam from every quarter, and the numerous aspects and attributes bestowed on him is a faithful projection into the older epic and puranic versions as well as an anticipation of the future elevation of Muruga to the supreme position of a national God of the Tamils, enjoying the sovereign status as that of Śiva and Viṣṇu.

Everywhere in the South, he is acclaimed as the God of Kaliyuga—*Kaliyuga Varada*. He continues to nurture the Tamil language. He married the maid of the hilly tribe, Valli, the pattern of a fusion of love and valour, as also of the Kshatriya traits blending with that of the primitive tribesmen. He was born in the Saravanai pond in the northern region of the Himalayas, nurtured by the Karttikai maids of the stellar spheres (constellation Pleiades) and became Skanda, the united one, when embraced by the Adisakti, Parvathi. The most characteristic weapon of Subrahmanya is the Sakti-Vel, which is said to have been abstracted from a portion of the solar glory. The

Saktiāyudha was fashioned for the use of Subrahmanya by Visvakarman and blessed by the Divine Mother, Parvathi. The kukkuta or cock represents the harbinger of the rising sun and the peacock whose feathers display a marvellous blending of colours represents the luminous glory of the sun. It is also the symbol of the variegated forms of delusion—Māya sakti.

He of six faces, Shanmuga or Arumugam, who is invoked with the six-lettered mantra—Om Saravana-bava—by the seers and brahmanas who perform the six duties—endowed with the divine powers of the five-faced Śiva together with that of Parasakti—overcame the mighty Surapadman and encamped victoriously at Tiruchendur, a southern shrine. He married Devayanai, the daughter of Indra and symbol of Kriyasakti, the consolidated energy of the armies of the Devas, at Tirupparankunram, off Madurai. He is worshipped popularly with his consorts in the South, whereas He is a Brahmachari in the Northern tradition, even though as Kumaraswami, the preceptor and as Dandhayudha Pani, the ascetic, he is worshipped in many temples in the South. He is the eternal teacher who dispels ignorance by the light of knowledge and wisdom. "By the aid of his nine warriors (navavīrar)—Jagrat, svapna, susupti, vichara, search for the Guru, sravanam, mananam, nityasanam, and nirvikalpapasamadhi, he destroys the *ego* that is Sūran, *krodha* that is Singhan, desire which is Taraka, melancholy which is Ajamuki by the power of the Vēl of wisdom". So indicated Sri K. Arunachala Kavundar in his excellent exposition on Muruga—the God

of our worship, in the Madurai M.D. College Silver Jubilee Journal, 1966.

Thus the manifestation of the Divine Child, Muruga-Kumāra, is an everlasting testament of the victory of Truth over falsehood; and all who combat evil forces in any form in their own nature as well as in the external nature can be truly said to participate in Muruga's grace. Those who overcome the asuric tendencies within and without, can be called the faithful warriors of Muruga, and reflect His splendour—Muruga Amsam. The concept of *Subrahmanya* as immortalised in *Kandapurānam* marked a new epoch in the history of His cult in South India and Ceylon and the worship of this God grew in importance and still evokes supreme devotion among all classes of people in these regions.

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## KATHIRGAMA RAHASYA

### *Prelude*

In the sylvan shrine of Kathirgamam, the veil is down. On it is an oil painting of Muruga with his consorts Valli and Devayanai who are regarded as His energies of will and action. Wherein lies the secret charm of the lowly sanctuary of Kathirgamam? What is behind the veil? Behind the veil lies hidden the *Guha*, who for ever deludes the grasp of man. Yet the thousand devotees who throng this shrine are aware that He is the supreme lover who abides in the heart of every human being. None can predict with certainty the power of the *Guha* behind the veil.

This unadorned temple in the south-eastern shore of Sri Lanka, in the heart of the Vedha country, skirted by the river Manicka Ganga and the forest and hills of the Uva District, has attracted kings and peasants, illiterate folk as well as learned pandits and priests, Hindus and Buddhists, men and women in all walks of life. They see only the veil and this veil is always down. The priest whose mouth is tied by a cloth moves in and out of this veil carrying the offerings of the devotees. There are no agamic rituals and he does not chant or intercede. In silence, to the



music of the drums and bells, he moves in and out of the veil, while the worshippers gaze from outside at the form of the Lord embellished on the veil. The light of the stately brass lamps and the burning camphor cast a halo of sanctity in the porch and outside. Kathirgamam evokes awe and reverence, love and worship among all types of people who visit this abode of Muruga for peace and solace.

"Sing we with one accord—Thou art the Lord Supreme for one and all".

*Natchinthanai*

From universal harmony springs harmony. This is the wonder we see in Kathirgamam today. From far and near throng many pilgrims to worship at the shrine of Muruga in His formless state. "He who is the essence of Truth and Wisdom, is the light of all existence and the flame of love". Sankara in *Subrahmanya Bhujangam*.

It is believed that like Benares and Gaya, this holy sanctuary also has been the object of veneration from the dawn of this satellite Earth. This ageless antiquity is impregnated with a modern and living dynamism, that constitutes the mystery that casts a halo round Kathirgamam. Records in stones, puranic lore and chronicles of Kings and priests and travellers' tales reveal many a miraculous phenomenon associated with this sylvan sanctuary, but none has succeeded in penetrating the veil that hides the object of worship—the *That Art Thou* of Kathirgamam. It has defied all analysis. This perhaps is the reason why so far no one has attempted to build a magnificent

temple around its humble edifice of brick and clay, and why no golden spires or domes or gopuras have come up over its topless roof. The mysterious force that draws so many people into its soothing shelter has withstood the grateful thanks of men while conferring on them bountiful favours.

The surge of historical ebb and flow in the island of Sri Lanka which had attracted invasions from near and far, the occupation by alien peoples of the West, the impact of the hand of Science, have left but negligible traces on the sylvan temple. It was not given to them to destroy or build a new Kathirgamam. The split personality of man, the split atom and the embarkation of man to the Moon and Mars have cleft asunder the mystery of man's life on earth. But the mystery of Kathirgāmam continues to baffle man on the objective plane. Not the senses five, nor the subtle faculties of the mind, can unravel the mystery of the *Unseen Power* that pervades the holiest sanctuary of Kathirgamam.

### *The Abode of Muruga:*

Kathirgamam is situated in the extreme south east of the island of Sri Lanka, amidst forests, hillocks and woodlands. It is about 200 miles from Colombo and the motorable road skirting the sea coast passes Galle, Matara, Hambantota and Tissamaharama. It is about twelve miles from the southern coastal town of Tissamaharama and about 26 miles from Buttala in the Uva province. The immediate forest is known as 'Deviange Kele', meaning God's jungle and the Manicka Ganga flows past this ancient temple, on its

left bank. Many pious pilgrims reach this sanctuary by treading on foot, beginning from Wattapala Amman Shrine in the Mullaitivu district and following the sea coast on the eastern side of Sri Lanka, passing through Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Pottuvil, and the Yala Sanctuary, and they take two to three months to do this journey by foot.

There is yet another route to Kathirgamam which follows the east sea coast up to Pottuvil and then cuts across the Uva province through Moneragala and Wellawaya following the course of the Manicka Ganga. This is the heart of the Vedha country and Kathirgamam is claimed by the Vedhas to be their sanctuary. A more picturesque route to Kathirgamam is to follow the high level road from Colombo, passing the rich rubber districts of Avisawela, Yatiyantota, Ratnapura, Balangoda, Haputale and dipping into the Uva plateau and reaching the sylvan shrine from the north.

Still preserving something of the primitive quietude of the woody glades haunted by elephants and wild animals and snakes and birds, Kathirgamam conjures to the ordinary man and woman in Sri Lanka, a place of deep sanctity and reverence. The place in and around Kathirgamam was peopled by the Vedhas, local tribes of Sri Lanka, who lived on flesh and honey and whose caves and habitats still preserve something of the primitive traits, though today the majority of the people are Sinhalese-Buddhists, who live in the areas around Kathirgamam, dotted here and there with Hindu Tamils and Muslims.

Kathirgamam is said to form the southern point of the axis along which two great sanctuaries of the Hindus lie—the holy mountain of the Hindu Pantheon, Mt. Kailas in Southern Tibet and Mount Kathirgamalai in Sri Lanka. Lord Śiva in the form of Dakṣiṇamurthy, the silent teacher seated under the banyan tree, taught by Chinmudra, the wisdom of the seers to the four preceptors of Hinduism. This Lord is said to face the South and hence Kathirgamam claims to be the abode of Kumara, the Son of Śiva, manifested as Gurunathan or Āchārya Swami.

This shrine lies hidden and far removed from the madding crowd, in the jungles of southern Sri Lanka, in the Vedha country. Geographically and historically, it has existed even before the coming of the Sinhalese into Sri Lanka. The Tamils claim it as the extant isle while the rest of their kingdom of Lemuria of the First and Second Academy of Letters was washed and submerged by the deluge. Today, as it was in the dim past, it is the main attraction of thousands of pilgrims drawn from all walks of life, creeds and faiths. The history goes back to centuries before the dawn of the christian era and its legends and myths to thousands of millennium. It is a rich hunting ground for the anthropologist, archaeologist and historian, who eagerly scour the place for remains of the past, but Kathirgāmam defies all analysis in the hands of the scientists or remakers of the past.

The one sure point in the maze of myths and legends is that the origin of Kathirgāmam goes back to the earliest Yuga, earlier than the Trēta or Dva-

para Yugas, when the Ramāyana or Mahābhārata were enacted. Muruga worship existed long before Rama fought Ravana about 2387 B.C. It was the heroic Age when Gods and Devas fought the Titans and Asuras on earth, and consorted with daughters of men. The sanctuary of Kathirgāmam immortalises one such testament of the victory of the Devas over the Titans—the triumph of good embodied in the commander-in-chief of the Devas, Lord Muruga, over the Asuric forces of evil, personified in Surapadman and his kin.

It is difficult to interpret the meaning of the name of this sanctuary and many are the readings. The full import of the name 'Kathirgāmam' or 'Katragama' will for ever remain a mystery. It is said that Kathirgāmam derives its name from Kārttikeya, the God nurtured by the Kārttikai maids at the Saravanai lake in the Himalayan region, where he was born out of the fiery sparks that emanated from the third eye of the Lord of Kailas—Śiva. Some may have it mean the village of Karttikeya, a shortened form of "Karttikeya grama". Also is prevalent another connotation which makes it the combination of the two words—'Kathir' meaning effulgence (Jyotir) and 'Kāmam' implying Love. In short it is a place where the *light* of Muruga mingled with the *love* of Valli, his consort. By the Sinhalese and Tamils alike, He is called Kandaswami; by the Sinhalese also Kandakumara and by the Tamils, Kumaraswami—the youthful Lord.

Thus Kathirgāmam is sacred to the God Karttikeya from whom according to Sir P. Arunachalam it

was called Karttikeya Grama (City of Karttikeya) shortened to Kajaragama and then to Kataragama. Whatever be the derivation of the name Kathirgāmam, Kanda being the Tamil form of the Sanskrit Skanda, is worshipped in the form of *Kantali*, which according to Tolkāppiar's commentator Naccinārki-niyar, is interpreted as "reality transcending all categories, without attachment, without form, standing alone as the Self". It is in this formless Essence that he is worshipped in Kathirgāmam, without any image, icon or symbol. Thus this ancient shrine holds a unique place among the many abodes of God Muruga in India and Sri Lanka.

*The Worship of Kumara, the Warrior-Lover:*

The mystery of Kathirgāmam is pivoted on the mystery of Kumara—the Son of Śiva in the form of Dakshinamurthi, the Guru holding silent discourse under the banyan tree—Kumara, formless and silent, kindling the expectation of faith and victory among his seekers. Kathirgāmam testifies that the expectation which crowns man with victory is the expectation of Faith. At all ages and climes, man has yearned for the victory of faith. When this urge overpowers one, then is one ready to make a pilgrimage to Kathirgāmam and secure victory which measures up to the degree of one's faith.

Kathirgāmam today and in the bygone yester-days and over the future, establishes the primacy of Faith. This is the key that can reveal the secret of the inner sanctum of Kathirgāmam. This is the hope and strength of the eternal peak of Kathira-



malai on which the Vēl, the instrument of the energy of wisdom, was implanted according to Hindu tradition by Muruga, the Deva Senāpathi, after he had defeated the evil hordes of the Asuras. He relinquished the tool of destruction and his role as a warrior God with six faces and twelve hands and transfigured himself as the radiant youth who courted Valli and wrested from her *the victory of faith*. He courted and won her at Kathirgāmam. The priests of Kathirgāmam (the Kapurālas) proudly claim kinship with her, to this day.

We cannot visit Kathirgāmam such as we would visit any other holy place. In order to derive the maximum benefit, we have to cultivate the expectation of faith and await the call—that deep inner conviction, the secret urge that fills one's whole being. One also should understand the inalienable nature of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. This is the *Kantali* worship of the Hindus. Godhead is invoked as permeating all orders of existence. He moves in every being, in every point of space and in every moment of time, sustaining all in His impersonal Self. All are names and forms in the bosom of this Eternal Being.

In the veiled silence before the holy of holies at Kathirgāmam, behind the signposts of forms which make up the veils there, a devotee worships before the curtain in holy reverence, and realises the impersonal divine existence, in which he sees the Divine not only supporting but also embodying itself in all things. Not only are we and all things in the Self, but the Self too is in all of them. It is this that makes

the name and form of Muruga, Valli, Peacock and Vel alive and real. That is why the Supreme Śiva in the name of Kathira Vel has chosen this sanctuary for a sport of His manifestation. From Him radiates waves of Light, Beauty and Bliss and from the infinitude of His Being, his manifested power, known also as Valli—His Iccha Sakti—awakens, and in His sovereign sway, all seekers deliver themselves for the completion of their life's mission.

The miracle of Kathirgāmam begins to work upon us only when we can take our *whole being* as the sacred offering. This is much more difficult than the offering of flowers and fruits and music and dance. What is required is a whole-hearted Samkalpa, an attitude of surrender imposed by each devotee from within, to the God of Light. This consecration should be effected in the purity of the body, mind and spirit. Here then is the need for a quiet, strong faith, and in order to make it effective, the pilgrim to Kathirgāmam does a hundred acts of penance and surrender, as bathing in the river Manicka Ganga, ascending the Kathiramalai peak, donning sandalwood paste on the shaven head, and carrying the polar Kāvadis with the peacock feathers and the lance which are the insignia of Muruga, the manifested form of the Son of the immaculate Sivam.

Before the Holy of Holies, the pilgrim performs his ecstatic dance, and what amazes the spectator is that the dance is performed by him without involvement as a doer. His face beams as he walks over the blazing fire or on the spiked sandals, and watching him, we have no doubt that he is wide awake to

the concealed regions of his being, where the divine in him supports him; he learns to let their revelation glide into his life process as well as into that of the onlookers' lives. These sights haunt our memory and remembrance is kept alive over the sessions of time.

All this testament proves that the true devotee who goes to Kathirgāmam in an intense expectation of faith, and whose worship assumes many lines of movement, derives deep inner fulfilment. It can be felt but not expressed. In every act, in every situation, the pilgrim at Kathirgāmam whatever his creed of belief or status, whatever he enacts in the wondrous glow of faith, that offering to Muruga of the fruit of his actions is the testament of love. The surrender of his actions in His presence as well as of the fruits thereof, betoken that he is not the doer. It is the work of the divine son, Muruga, the executive power of the transcendent Sivam, the One without a second, that is in full sovereign sway in Kathirgāmam.

The way of the pilgrim is fraught with difficulties. Once he crosses the Manicka Ganga and treads on the triangular roadway leading to the Sanctum Sanctorum of Kathirgāmam, he realises this truth in the depth of his being; neither action nor the results of action can bind him. A purifying bath in the waters of the Manicka Ganga effects a transforming change in the worshipper. The devotees who throng this shrine during the time of the festival season in March, July and November perform their vows in various ways. Some are seen carrying the clay vessel of holy ash, which is obtained in its natural

form in the neighbouring Vibhūti hill, and which is the unique Prasād of worship at Kathirgāmam; and these clay pots on the crown of their heads blaze with the flame of camphor, as they perambulate the temple. The flame of camphor signifies the radiance of Kathira Vēl whom they invoke. Together they chant the holy name of Muruga or *Harō Harah*, the incantation of jubilation and sing His praises with cymbals and drums; their evil desires consumed, these devotees imperceptibly merge into the *Jyothi* of pure illumination.

It may be that on full moon nights, the ancient Bo tree behind this sanctuary gets lit up with coconut oil lamps and the faces of the worshippers are also lighted up. The peace of the sky and trees mingle with the infinite calm of the devotees, kneeling under the shady Bo tree. The divine force of the invisible Muruga is at work. Such is the foundation of a new harmony that we can witness in Kathirgāmam today. As the bells chime, the Vedha maids come out to light the oil lamps, and millet and honey are brought as offerings under cover, and the High Priest with his mouth tied by a cloth makes his obeisance before the Veil; the temple, the worshippers, the Manicka Ganga and the seven hills of Kathirgāmam become an integral part of the centre of divine dynamism.

All that is demanded of us is that we should open the avenues of our minds and increase the progression of faith in the light of Kathirgāmam. There is no one to guide the seeker here, as witnessed in *Tirumurugārrupadai*. He tunes himself to the inner voice. It will work in its own rhythm, with its own

pace and stress, varying with each individual need. All that is demanded of us is that we should cultivate a continual remembrance, an unshakable faith in the bliss that is Kathirgāmam. A vigilant effort becomes necessary to draw one nearer the spark, whence he can behold the radiance of centuries. Thence his entire human nature transforms into that of divine nature. Kandan has become *Guha* and he has taken His place in the innermost core of our hearts. He is in possession of each one of the million worshippers who seek the refuge of His shrine.

In this context, we can avow that Kathirgāmam declares the universal aspect of Muruga. The Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist traditions that have grown round this shrine cannot exclusively limit its universality. In Kathirgāmam we see the play of the boundless infinite Sakti, the play of Valli who is charged with the potency of love, and whatever be the time taken to unravel the mystery behind the Veil at Kathirgāmam, whatever be the failings we perceive in the instrumental nature, its fulfilment in the man of Faith is inevitable.

The many legends connected with the Lord of Kathirgāmam, the heroic deeds and love related in the epics, puranas and religious poems of the Hindus and Buddhists, bring out the significance of the harmony that underlies the individual will becoming a part of the Universal will. As long as the Titan Gods, Surapadman and Singamugan, choose to act according to the dictates of their own ego-will, regardless of the demands of the greater will signified in Muruga, who represents the Son of God through



the dynamic force or executrix who is Parvathi, or All-Nature, there is bound to be friction, struggle and catastrophe. This friction is not merely an act in time, traceable to dim antiquity, as related in Kanda-puranam, but it faces us at every turn in the complicated life of today. As one learns to identify oneself and make oneself its instrument, as did the Gods in their crisis against the Asuras, the friction wanes and a harmonic expansion is ensured. To awaken man today to this role of the instrument, carrying out the duties of his individual life as well as service to humanity, is the magnificent call of Kathirgāmam; and it is true today as it was in the remote past.

All the astounding acts of penance, all the willing acts of fervent worship, and the mighty surge of alms giving, reveal the earnest efforts of the pilgrim seeker to equip himself as a willing instrument, to feel the innermost law of his nature, and to set the chords of his being to be in tune with this demand of the soul. He becomes a joyous tool of the will of Muruga, the power emanating from the absolute Sivam, who pervades the whole Universe. He is the one force that works in the individual as well as in the universe. The pilgrim's arduous climb up the *Kathiramalai Hill* brings him face to face with the significant symbol of Muruga, the *Kathira-Vēl*. It is the most effective of the facets of His wisdom. That this sacred symbol should have become the object of dispute between the Hindus and Buddhists is the tragedy of the modern age. In the lila of manifestation, the *Vēl* will forever be a sequent radiation of the divine consciousness and power.



It is in the background of this realisation of a Divine Energy working on all planes of one's being, that the presence of Muruga in and around the seven hills of Kathirgāmam begins to react on all the devout seekers who visit this shrine. They become His vassals for the out-pouring of His ineffable Grace. The luminous *rahasya* of Kathirgāmam consists in the worship of the formless One. Muruga works within oneself; He courts Valli (the human soul) and the Divine manifesting in the Universe also pulsates within one's own self, leading to the highest realisation of the transcendent Sivam.

We go to Kathirgāmam to witness this wondrous manifestation, and the reward of a pilgrimage to this sacred shrine is that this miracle is repeated in the pilgrim's *anubhuti* of seeing the One Divine in all around, in the hallowed precincts, and within his own self. This is the miracle enacted by every pious devotee who goes to Kathirgāmam in faith; and when thousands flock, there is peace and succour. Once a pilgrim has crossed the bar, the river that flows and gleams like gems, called the Manicka Ganga, he perceives all as intimate as *Thou* and not as the impersonal *It*. In the sylvan shrine, he forgets the "I" in the "Thou" relationship.

Muruga is the lover, the object of adoration. Relentless are His encounters with the evil forces which lurk around the fortresses of man's ego, where His lance (Vēl) penetrates as it did in days of yore, and destroys the asuric citadels of delusion, bondage and ego. The thought of his ceaseless pursuit after the human soul, the beloved Valli, so elusive and yet so

worthy of his chase, gives meaning to our lives and opens new horizons in the scale of human attainment. Such is the glory of Kathirgāmam as we see it today and experience the glow of Muruga's grace.

We shall now turn to focus attention on the modes of worship which prevailed in the past as described in *Tirumurugārrupadai*, and which are continued with modifications to this day. It is one of the outstanding abodes of Muruga where the peculiar flavour of sanctity described in the '*Kunrutoradal*' section of *Tirumurugārrupadai* is preserved today.

## KATHIRAVEL KĀNDAM

### *The God of Kathirgāmam:*

The Gods of the Hindu Pantheon are an integral part of the religious life of Sri Lanka. Professor Raghavan in his paper on "*Murugan*" read before the Archaeological Society of South India in 1964 states that the distinction is clear in the minds of the Buddhist-Sinhalese between the precepts and doctrines of Buddhism inculcating the righteous way of life, and the cult of Muruga, Vishnu and Pattini Devi of the Hindus, who seek spiritual salvation through the paths of Jnana (Knowledge), Yoga (meditation), and Bhakti (devotion). Yet the Buddhists and Hindus propitiate these Gods in unison, with prayers and offerings for help and divine intercession in the problems and difficulties that beset man in his day-to-day life. The harmony of religious and social life is thus maintained, and no conflict arises between the two systems of religion.

At Kathirgāmam today, we witness also a mingling of the folk religion of the Yakkas, modern Vedhas, aboriginal people of south Sri Lanka, with their traditional ceremonials and rituals, and the cult of the High Gods of the Hindu Pantheon. These are

worshipped in the transcendent formless state, the *Kantali* worship of the ancient Tamils, and in manifested forms as Kanda, Muruga with six faces and twelve arms, and Perumal or Vishnu the protector, and the divine Mother called by different names and invoked in accordance with the prescribed religious modes of the enlightened seers, and enjoined in the Scriptures and Puranas.

“The priest worships him with elaborate rites and ceremonies; the rustic with meal and blood offerings; the aboriginal Vedha invokes him with dances in the primitive manner of the woods. The philosopher meditates on him in silence, adoring him as the Supreme God, Subrahmanya, the all-pervading spirit of the universe, the Essence from which all things are evolved, by which they are sustained and into which they are involved; who in gracious pity for humanity takes form sometimes as the youthful God of Wisdom, also as God of war when wicked Titans (Asuras) have to be destroyed; sometimes as the holy child Muruga, type of perennial tender beauty, always and everywhere at the service of his devotees.” (Sir P. Arunachalam on the Kataragama God).

*Subrahmanya Parakrama* is a Tamil work by Mahavidwan Sri La Sri N. Kathiravelu Pillai of Jaffna, which was published in 1922. It is a mass of miscellaneous collection of legendary tales from several puranas and stories in Sanskrit and Tamil. From the nature of the title it is full of miracles and thrilling accounts.

In No. 79, under the title Kathirgāma God, the superiority of this shrine is described. "This is *Dva-dasantam* or mysterious in the form of Jyoti, and is beyond the reach of gods and men. Even today it is shrouded in mystery. The holy stream is Manicka Ganga and the hills are known as Kathira Malai, Valli Malai, Pillayar Malai, Theyvayanai Malai, Vishnu Malai, Kala Bhairava Malai and Kali Malai. The deities are Subrahmanya, Śiva, Ganesha, Uma, Vira Bhairava, Mahasta, Navalakkavirapushkala, Maha Kali, Durga—all these worship Subrahmanya and reside on all sides."

"The various names of this shrine are Dakshinakhandapuri, Hemakūtam, Amsugamam, Kathirai, Kathiragāmam, Bhulokakhandapuri, Kumara Kottam, Vannimangalam, Karikappu, Varapuri, Panchamurtivasam, Sakala Devopasyam, Agastyapriyam, Chidākasam, Guhaitalam, Daharālayam, Hiranmayakosam, Antarakasam and Avyaktamurtipuri. The Lord Kumara with His two consorts Valli and Devayanai, Kriya and Iccha Saktis respectively, resides on this mount, eternally performing many miracles. The devotees can realise that the gods worship Him daily even today. Kumara came down from Mount Kailas and listened to the might of Surapadman and his atrocities to the Devas, from Brihaspati, the guru of the devas. So He crossed the ocean and hills and came down to Kataragama to wage a war with the Titans. He wished to enter Mahendra, the residence of Asuras. But Brahma, Vishnu and Indra protested that he should not encamp in the realm of the Asuras; accordingly He asked the architect Visvakarma to build a temple and palace on the banks of the Manicka

Ganga which he accordingly did. The Lord took His residence here and destroyed the Asura forces and the city of Mahendragiri and arrived at Uttara-Katiragāmam (Ambaraturai or Ubhaya Kathirgāmam). This became for Muruga the real camp or Pāsarai, for his armies."

"Thereafter he abided in this shrine called Hemakuta; the vision of the Lord is described clearly. He has six faces, eighteen eyes, six crowned heads with garland of kadamba flowers, adorning the chest; and in the hands on the right side were the flag, vajra, ankusa, bow, vel, abhaya mudra; and in the hands of the left side were the lotus, kandamani, axe, thandu, bow and varada mudra respectively. He shone like the splendour of millions of suns and was accompanied by numberless hosts and devas and minstrels singing His praises". The author of this narration attributes the inability of human beings to comprehend his infinity and enjoy the supreme vision of His splendour, and gives it as the reason for the sanctum sanctorum being shrouded in mystery. Muruga has assumed the *avyakta* or the unmanifested form.

The word *Kathirgāmam* is split into two—*Kathir* or *Jyothi*, and *Kamam* or *Ananda*, and He confers the supreme bliss or *ananda* to all devotees. It is also an illumination. This might also mean that He can be known in the *Turiya* or *Guhajnanam* state whence he will grant them the *Guha-Sayujyam* or the supreme bliss. Another interpretation of the Lord of Kathirgāmam is also explained thus: "*Kathir* means the rays of the Sun and Moon, and *Kamam* stands for the place desired by them for worship;



hence the name "Kathirgāma Moorthy" denotes the giver of enjoyment here and hereafter, and one who resides in the form of Jyothi for the salvation of His devotees in the cave of their hearts." This in short is the popular tradition of the Hindus living in Sri Lanka on the history of Muruga of Kathirgāmam.

*Other Points of View on Kathirgāmam:*

The following extract on Katragama by late Mudaliar Rasanayagam, J.P., retired C.C.S. and author of *Ancient Jaffna*, will be read with interest. The readers can form their own judgment about the views expressed in these lines. The theories elaborated by Mudaliar cannot be proved in the strict sense of the term; neither can they be disproved. It is doubtful whether all the statements will be acceptable to the historians and to the people brought up in different traditions.

"It is said in Nakkirar's commentary to Irayanar Ahaporul which gives a full account of the three Tamil Sangams—Nakkirar himself having been a member of the third Sangam—that Śiva, the Lord who burnt the Tripura, and the luminous One Muruga who blew the Hill, were several millenniums ago, the presidents of the first Tamil Sangam. There was also Agasthyar, known as the father of Tamil literature. It is not necessary now to prove that the Muruga Kadavul who presided at the first Sangam Age was the same as the slayer of Sūran. There is plenty of evidence in Tamil literature that Ceylon and its Yakka capital of Mahendra was adjacent to the Tamil country with its capital of Madura, where

the first Sangam was established. The cause of war must have been the persecution and tyranny practised by Sūran over his neighbours, the Tamils, although the Puranas would have it that the persecuted people were celestials.

“Murugan after his victory, encamped at Katragama, fell in love with Valli, the daughter of a chieftain of the Kuravars and married her. The reason for his encampment at Katragama was perhaps to be in the midst of a friendly tribe, and not among a Yakka tribe—his enemies who occupied the other parts of Ceylon. The God’s romance with Valli, the maiden of the wilds, and daughter of a Vedha Chieftain, is among the legends which associate Muruga with Lanka. Pursuing the daughter of the jungles, Karttikeya arrives at the jungle resort of South Ceylon, known as Kataragama, the abode of God Kadira, where the God marries her. A visitor to Kataragama can scale the walls outside the main pillared hall, and notice a series of panels in mild colours, illustrating the life story of Valli from infancy to maidenhood ending with her marriage to the God. One of the scenes shows the abundant hill crops of maize, with birds hovering over and settling over the maize cobs, and Valli sling in hand scaring away the birds. It is a pictorial version of the episode in the career of the God.

“Ravana was another Yakka King who ruled over Lanka long after Sūran. The Rama-Ravana war is surmised to have taken place about 2400 B.C. following a traditional statement in the Rajvalli that

a large portion of the kingdom of Ravana was engulfed by the sea in 2347 B.C.

“During the Rama-Ravana period, Kavadapuram was the capital of the Pandyas and the home of the Second Tamil Sangam. It was established after the destruction of Madura, their first capital and the home of the first Tamil Sangam. Therefore, the time of Sūran and that of Muruga Kadavul of the first Sangam period must have been at least 2 or 3 millenniums earlier than the Ravana period.”

Muruga became deified in the dim antiquity for his glorious deeds of valour against the Titans, off the southern coast of Lanka and he became the most popular god of Lanka and particularly was he cherished by the Kurinchi tribes, who considered him as their tutelary God. He was first and foremost worshipped at Katragama where he had encamped and married. The Tamil Kurinchi tribe who sponsored the worship of Muruga Kadavul at Katragama was later called Vedhas, an appellation given to all tribes who lived by hunting. The jungle Vedhas still boast of royal descent. It is specially to be noted that the members of this Vedha tribe, who claim relationship with Muruga are still the priests of the temple at Katragama, and they carry on the priestly duties of offering rice cooked with deer flesh, which is foreign to Hindu worship, but is a proto-Hindu practice.

Viewed against the background of early history and the geographical setting, the study of Katragama becomes more objective and intelligible. More than

any other factor, its situation in the heart of South-East Lanka determined the part it was to play in the life of the land. South Lanka, the Ruhunu of early ages, was a region very conspicuous in the Middle Ages, next in importance only to Raja Rata, within which was included the Capitals of the Kings. Katragama in the Second and Third centuries B.C. was the seat of a Kshatriya clan whose representatives, "the nobles of Kajaragama" were present at the festival held at Anuradhapura on the arrival of the great Bodhi tree. We are told in the Mahavamsa that it was ruled by the sons of the Kings. It was a refuge for the Kings in times of political reverses. Ruhunu was, next to Raja Rata, the best governed part of Lanka.

As the Ruhunu Maha Devala, the war God of Katragama, was the supernatural force to whom Kings and Princes supplicated and prayed in a difficult situation, such as confronted Dutugemunu, the Prince of Ruhunu at the time. In the performance of his vow, the Prince endowed, enriched and extended the temple. How far back in point of time the temple dates we are left to surmise.

Tamil traditions, reflections of which are caught in the *Kalpana Vaibava Malai*, ascribes to Vijaya, the building of a temple to "*Kadirai-Andavar*," a tradition which disposes us to trace the worship of the God, at least to the days of Vijaya (5th Century B.C.). With the goal of political stability set before him, it is conceivable that Vijaya was not unmindful of divine aid in his task of overcoming all impediments towards achieving full overlordship.

That Vijaya either inaugurated or advanced the worship in an already existing shrine, as his illustrious successor Dutugemunu did later, is a reasonable conclusion. The God of Katragama commands the allegiance of all Lanka, Hindus and Buddhists all over the world.

*The Chronicles of Kathirgāmam:*

Dr. Davy writing in 1821 described a visit to Kathirgāmam: "Kataragama has been a place of considerable celebrity on account of its Dewale which attracts pilgrims not only from every part of Ceylon, but even from remote parts of the continent of India..... Of all the gods, the Kataragama God is the most feared.....and such is the dread of this being that I was never able to induce a native artist to draw a figure of it". It is even now believed that Kathirgāmam overpowers the soul by instilling awe and fear.

In Kathirgāmam, God Muruga is worshipped without any image or form. In the Holy of Holies, it is reported from reliable sources, there is only a mystic chest containing a 'Yantra' (mystic diagram) engraved on a Pancha loga (combination of five metals) tablet, in which the divine power and grace are believed to dwell. Kathirgāmam came into greater prominence soon after the Samādhi of the venerable Swami Kalyanagiri in the early seventeenth century. Swami Kalyanagiri was the discoverer of modern Kathirgāmam. It is he who revitalized Kathirgāmam by his great yogic powers and

made Muruga, the beloved of Valli, the magnetic centre of worship.

We would like to quote here a graphic account of his life as related by Swami Asangananda in his book *Katragama, the Holy of Holies*.

"Several centuries ago, a saint of North India, Swami Kalyanagiri by name, was overwhelmed with sorrow at the prolonged stay of Lord Karthikeya in Lanka, and determined to bring Him back to the mainland. With this end in view, the revered Swamiji visited Kataragama, but failed to get an audience with the Lord in spite of his strenuous efforts; and therefore, he plunged himself into the depths of austere penances and spiritual practices for a long period of twelve years, in the course of which a Vedha boy and a girl used to attend on him with all love and care.

"At the end of the twelfth year, one day, he was sorrowfully mourning over his failure to get a vision of the Lord after such a long time, and he fell fast asleep. Just then the Vedha boy came and woke him. Being thus disturbed in his sleep, the sage cried aloud in anger, "How dare you disturb my rest when you know that this is the first time I have slept for years?" The boy uttered and muttered a few words of excuse and began to run away followed by the Swamiji till he came to an islet in the river and the long cherished desire of the saint was fulfilled. Lo! the boy then transformed himself as Lord Subrahmanya!



"At once a new light flashed before the saint's mind and to his great joy, he came to realise that the Vedha boy and girl were none other than Lord Karthikeya and Goddess Valli. With all devotion he fell prostrate at the holy feet of Lord Skanda, begged pardon for his act and requested the Deity to return to India. Then came a tug of war—on one side stood Goddess Valli who made her appeal not to leave her and Kataragama, and on the other the Swamiji with folded hands pressed for the Lord's return to Bharatavarṣa. In the end, the request of Valli prevailed over the latter and both Lord Skanda and Swami Kalyanagiri settled down at Kataragama.

"Here, it is said, that the venerable Swamiji again threw himself heart and soul into austere spiritual practices and, before he left his mortal coil, he left the legacy of his Tapasya engraved on a golden plate, a Yantra (mystic diagram), and enshrined it in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple constructed or restored with the help of the then King of Ceylon. Tradition has it that when he gave up his body, he was changed into a pearl image, whence came the name, *Muthulinga Swami*, and he is still being worshipped by that name in the temple adjoining Valli Amman temple.

"It was this Swami who recovered as it were from the debris of age-long antiquity, the temple of Lord Subrahmanya and restored it to its pristine purity and revitalised the whole atmosphere with electric spirituality and thus transformed the sacred place of Kathirgāmam into a gigantic power house of sanctity and holiness.

"Unpretentious as the structure is at Kathirgāmam, God Muruga is most omnipotent and no God in Ceylon is more assiduously propitiated than the God of Kathirgāmam. A visit to Kathirgāmam takes man away from the fleeting evanescent toils and makes him repose on the fulness of Muruga's Grace. This temple takes the form of a triangle. In the *Bindu* station (the station of consciousness) is Muruga and on the two sides of the broad based triangle lie the temples of Valli and Devayanai Amman.

"In Kathirgāmam, the temple is covered with copper tiled roof. In front of the main temple is a dais where are found many layers of curtains painted with different forms of Muruga. They say that there are seven such curtains, connoting that in our human body are six stations of consciousness or yogic centres which are veiled ādharas from *muladharam* to *agjnai*, and on the seventh is the *Dvatha Santam* of pure effulgence. The seventh stage of santam which follows perfect meditation is the gateway to light. The gnostics have interpreted that behind the veils of the Kathirgāmam sanctuary, is enshrined the mystic Yantra of Muruga's grace in the form of a diagram and mystic letters."

### *Forms and Stages of Worship in Kathirgāmam:*

The majority of the people require external symbols. For, it is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive and concentrate one's mind on abstract qualities or ideas. Hence the origin and utility of image worship. It is an undeniable fact that external symbols or images help the beginner in concentration or medita-

tion. But it should be remembered at the same time that it is only the first step and the aspirant has to go forward and ascend to the highest goal through many intermediate steps. Finally, he reaches the stage when all work is worship and the distinction between secular and spiritual vanishes altogether. In the Hindu scripture, we find sixteen Upachāras or items of worship, viz., Āsanam (Seat), Madhuparka (mixture of ghee, honey, sugar and water), Punarachamaniyam (Scented water), Snāniyam (Water for bath), Vastram (Cloth with scent and sandal paste), Uttariyam (Upper cloth), Abharanam (Jewels), Gandha (White and red sandal paste), Pushpa (Flowers with sandal paste), Mālyam (Garland with scent and sandal paste), Dhūpa (Incense sticks), Dīpa (Light), Naivēdyam (Food offering), Pāniyam (Water for drinking), Achamaniyam (Water), Tāmbulam (Betel with lime, cardamom, cinnamon, clove etc.).

Worship may also be done simply with sandal paste and flowers or with the five items of worship, viz., sandal paste, flower, incense stick, light and fruits and sweets, or with ten items of worship, viz., water for washing the feet (Padyam), offering of Bilva leaf, Durva grass, sandal paste, flower and rice (Arghya), water for sipping (Achamaniyam), water for bath (Snanam), water for further sipping (Punarachamaniyam), and the five items mentioned above. Even when one is engaged in this external and objective form of worship, he has first to meditate on the form of Ishtam or Chosen Deity in the lotus of his heart and bring this image out and conceive it as pervading the external symbol before him. *Kathir-*

*gāmam* which has no image evokes what is called the *Manasa Puja* or mental worship. All the sixteen items are thought of and offered mentally. (Vide Śiva Mānasa Puja, Slokas 1-3). This culminates in the complete identification of all our actions with the worship of God. (Vide Śiva Mānasa Puja, Sloka 4.):

“Thou art (my) Atman, my intellect is Girija (the daughter of the Himalaya and consort of Śiva); my sense-organs are Thy attendants; (this) body is Thy temple; ministering to the enjoyment of the objects of the senses is (my) worship to Thee; (my) sleep is Samādhi; all (my) moving about on foot is the act of performing the rite of Pradakshinam (walking round the deity from left to right); all the words (spoken) are hymns to Thee;—whatever works I do, they are offered for Thy worship, O Sambhu.”

In this condition of mind, there is no room for difference between the worshipper and the worshipped, as both have become identical. “Thus, verily through the idea of oneness alone, is the highest worship to be performed, without distinction of time and circumstances, by the highest knowers of Brahman.” This is the mode of worship that had been practised by saints like Kalyānagiri, Pāl Gudi Bawa, Sri Kesopur Swami and other saints in Kathirgāmam, so that even today we find many an ascetic Swami practising penance and meditation in the hill slopes and under trees. They are what Nakkirar called *Antanars*—a disciplined community of worshippers who

take delight in righteous deeds and are the *Guides* of righteous life.

The Kathira-Vēl is pleased with the ritual worship of these Seers in the form of sacrificial fires, lit as an offering to Him, since He is the source of pure knowledge. We can see the fire always burning in the *Homakundam*—the sacrificial fire-place even today in the temple of St. Kalyānagiri, who is believed to have changed into a pearl image (*Muthulingam*). He is worshipped in an adjoining shrine next to Valli's temple, under the name of Muthulinga Swami. He is said to have lived in the first part of the 17th century; and seated on the *Kalyana Madima*, this line of Sadhus did 'tapas' or meditation in the Dattatreya tradition, facing the sanctuary of the Devayanai Amman Temple which was administered by them. This institution belongs to a section of the Dasanāmi order of monks founded by Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada of the Sringeri Mutt in Mysore.

This 'Peetam' known as Kalyana Madam and used by the founder Kalyanāgiri Swami is a large seat made of clay and raised on a platform with high sides and back, like an easy chair without legs. It is covered with leopard skins and contains several instruments and insignia used in the performance of the temple rites. A large fire keeps on burning all the time. This is a concept of Muruga with his consort Devayanai, as a source of wisdom and accordingly their worship followed the pattern of the worshippers, the Munivar, described by Nakkīrar in Tiruvavinangudi (Palani) in his poem *Tirumurugarrupadai*.

## KATHIRGAMAM TODAY

Sella-Kathirgāmam is the Old Katragama, four miles up the river and is the site of the love scene between Kumara and Valli. Near it is a shrine to Ganesa, reputed to have played a prominent part at their encounter. One mile short of Sella-Kathirgāmam is Valli's cave where she is said to have churned milk as evidenced to this day by the dark slimy deposits on the rock within.

The big temple square has the main temple with Ganesa and Perumal Kovil and the Bo tree and Pat-tini shrine behind. The smaller square contains a casket sacred to Ishwara. The "Karandua of Ishwara", an oven shaped casket containing a small effigy of this God stands on a platform in a small room and a veil of Devayanai Amman is screened. There is also the *Kalāna maduma*, and a temple to Bhairava and a rest house for pilgrims. At the end of the long avenue from the main temple is the Kiri Vihara.

In the main temple there are two apartments. Inner apartment (Adyatanam) is dark and supposed to have seven curtains and entered by only the officiating priests. As we have stated elsewhere, there is a



casket said to contain a mystic diagram engraved on a golden tablet (Yantra) which is thought to possess divine power and grace.

Three pujas are done daily by the Kapurālas in the main temple—the morning puja from 5 a.m. to 6 a.m.; the noon puja from 11 a.m. to 12 noon; and the evening puja from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. The Valli temple is about 300 yards from the main temple and is in charge of a Kapurāla and here too, there is a veil with the painting of Valli, which is never lifted.

During the festival days, the casket containing the mystic yantra is daily taken to the Valli temple and taken inside the veil and puja offered and brought back whence the procession returns to the main temple.

There is also a Muslim mosque. It is said to be a monument of a muslim saint by name Karma Nabi who is said to have discovered a hidden spring here which made immortal those who drank of its waters. He is also said to have served Kalyanāgiri Swami.

The Kiri Vihara is an ancient dagoba said to have been founded by King Mahanaga of Mahagama about 300 B.C.

The worship and puja at Muruga temple is most peculiar. The Kapurāla, tongue-tied, faces the curtain and salutes. Then twelve *Alathi Ammas* with brass lamps come to the dais and to each a wick is given by the priest and they light it and perform the *alathi* ceremony. The Kapurāla repeats the silent

salutation, followed by the *alathi* ceremony. For the third time, the priest hails the God in silence. Then he goes inside where the casket is, and puja is offered. The casket is borne to the *Vahana meda*—the mounting place, where an elephant bathed in Manicka Ganga and gaily decorated bears the divine symbol and the priest. This is done only during the festival days. The procession begins from the outer courtyard of the main temple and goes round the *Pitta Vithiya* to Valli temple. Then after the puja there, the procession bearing the casket returns by the *Medda Vithiya*, back to the temple, with the same rites as at first enacted and the casket is deposited in its original place.

The pageant is most impressive. Drums throb; the caparisoned elephant moves; lighted torches and singing parties and burning camphor pots, Kandyan dancing and shouting of *Haro Harah* rend the air.

The mantra used in invoking Kanda is *Hara-Hara* (Sanskrit) which is *Ara-Ara* or *Aro-Hara* in Tamil. The philologist will see in this word the Sumerian *Ra* and also the same root in *Ararat*—The House of God—the region which is thought by some orientlists to be the home of the Tamils. The pure rituals in the temples follow the edicts in Tantra. On the last day at the precise hour of the full moon is the water cutting ceremony. A magic circle is drawn in the Manicka Ganga by the priest with a sanctified sword. Within this, the casket is placed and immersed, covered by a cloth in a palanquin. Then the casket is taken on an elephant to the Valli temple and brought back to its permanent abode later in the day.

Mount Kathiramalai which is 2,500 feet high and three miles from Kathirgāmam is on our right as we approach from Tissa. We have already stated the sanctity of the Vēl which is implanted on this peak. Many pilgrims during the festival season climb up this peak and fulfil their vows in the presence of the victorious Vēl, the symbol of illumined wisdom (Jnanam). The highlight of the worship of Muruga in this shrine is penance and pain and the votaries make vows and fulfil them. So great is the potency of their faith. The miracle of Kathirgāmam defies analysis.

Thus we see Kathirgāmam as an abode of Muruga in His transcendental state, and in the form of *Effulgence*, He gives vision to His devotees. It is situated in the midst of dense forest lands and mountain ranges where usually sacred temples to Muruga are found, as described in Nakkīrar's "Kunruthoradal and Pazhamuthircholai" abodes. The Vedhas who inhabited these regions were also known as "Sabarar—Pulijnar" in the epic of Manimekalai. In Kanda-puranam is an allusion to "Kandavetpu"—"the peak Kandavetpu towers in the range of Velliāngiri"—as being the birth-place of Valli and tradition has located the place in Sri Lanka as "Kathirmalai" or Kathirgāmam. Some think it is in Thondai Nad called Vallimalai. "Dakshina Kailaya Mānmiyam" which is in Sanskrit alludes to the temple on the mount of Kathirgāmāgiri, which was one of the encampments of Muruga in His exploits against the Asura forces, and mentions that it was built by the divine architect Visvakarma and called *Chintamani*, a place of intense luminosity.

Tradition avows that the Mount of Kathirgāmam, lit up by "Sun, Moon and Agni", was known also as Jyotir-Kāmagiri, a Mount of radiant light. In Kathirgāma Puranam is a verse which describes the above thus:

"The moon, sun and fire are in unison  
Radiating their resplendent effulgence.  
Radiating the luminous sparks is Muruga  
Who lights up the world by his peerless light."

He was known in Kathiramalai Paḷḷu poem as the young Lord of Kathirai who wields the victorious lance—"Kumaresar of renowned Vēl"—(71). It was a popular refuge for the Sinhalese Kings of the mediaeval ages, who were defeated in war by the Chola invasions over Ceylon and Dutugemunu and his line of successors, who resorted to Kathirgāmam for succour and penance. Rajasingha I, who had killed his father to ascend the throne, expiated his sin by doing severe penance on the banks of the Manicka Ganga and obtained the grace of Muruga when he restored the temple buildings; this coincided with the period of Kalyānagiri Swami who belonged to an orthodox Vaishnavite brahmin family and of the Dasanāmi order from Sringeri in India. He did penance for twelve years in Kathirgāmam and was responsible for re-establishing the sanctity of the Kathirgāmam temple.

During this period of time, that is, during the reign of Rajasingha II (1627-1679 A.D.), when the renovations to the Valli, Devayanai Amman temples were completed, we find another revealing document called Kathiramalai Paḷḷu—a collection of Paḷḷu poetry

sung on the glory of Kathirgāmam. In many a lyric, we find references to the rebuilding of the temple by Kalyānagiri and his Kalyāna Peetam and to his patron, Rajasingha II. It is a strange coincidence in the Murugology that this renaissance period also marked the period of Tirupugazh poems sung on Muruga by St. Arunagiri in the South Indian shrines. In the Paḷḷu poems, we find frequent references to the "triangular pathway leading to the main temple of Muruga and the six-phased yantra (mystic diagram)", which constituted the key pattern of worship. They became the characteristic features of worship at Kathirgāmam from the seventeenth century.

The casket bearing this yantra is taken out in procession twice a year by the *triangular path*, and the festivals in July and November mark the summit of piety. The triangle signifies the Sun, Moon and Fire, which are supposed to be the triple eyes of Śiva, and indicate the genesis of Muruga who appeared as six sparks. His mantra is six-syllabled and hence the six-phased yantra signifies the truth of the formless Light manifesting in the mystic yantra, installed by Kalyānagiri in the Holy of Holies and celebrated in the Kathiramalai Paḷḷu poems. It is to this fact that Robert Knox refers in his book on the *Historical Relations of Ceylon* written in the reign of Rajasingha II when he was imprisoned for twelve years. He states that the people were afraid to mention the God of Kathirgāmam or portray His form.

The Paḷḷu poem is dedicated to the son of Amaranathan who is popularly believed to be Kalyānagiri Swami. By its popularity, it has survived in fact de-

ying the ravages of time and is sung as a folk ballad by the peasants and villagers even today. We quote the following extracts from that valuable edition of Kathiramalai Paḷḷu by V. Coomaraswamy (1935), Jaffna.

“A Paḷḷu poem has a twofold aspect as a literary composition. One lies in its being a classical product as one of the ninety-six varieties of Tamil poetry known as Prabhandams, confirming to a standard both in metre and matter prescribed in prosody on that behalf. The other is the dramatic aspect of the Paḷḷu. Now it is wonderful to observe that Kathiramalai Paḷḷu had both these aspects developed in Ceylon. In its classical side, it has been the parental stock of two or three other Paḷḷu poems, e.g., the Gnana Paḷḷu of the Catholics and the Paralai and Kanagarayan Paḷḷu of the Hindus; and in its dramatic side it had developed into a Nādagam and later on into a Vilāsam—with alterations and additions suited to the stage of either in their days, for the delectation of the unlearned masses, especially of the Harijans.”

The author himself strikes the true keynote of the universal popularity in the opening stanza of Kathiramalai Paḷḷu:

“No one despises even a dog’s skin, when the crown of a monarch has been placed on it. Similarly, my verses though defective, would be acceptable to the great, because they sing of the glory of Kathirgama God”.

In other words, the sacred name of the divine hero of this poem was enough to cover a multitude of



blemishes in the poem. This accounts for the popularity and survival of Kathiramalai Paḷḷu as a fine ballad.

"The younger and kindlier God Muruga with six faces and twelve hands, each face with its corresponding hands being assigned distinctly correlated functions in the Cosmic Evolution, is perhaps the grandest conception of Divine Manifestation in the Saivite Pantheon". He is found closely associated with the Tamil land and Tamil poetry from the very beginning, and a whole range of literature in praise of Him can be traced from the dawn of history.

Muruga is a favourite deity of caste Hindus and Harijans alike, of the learned as well as of the untutored, and in the cosmopolitan and far-famed temple of Kathirgāmam, caste Hindus, Harijans, Buddhists and Muslims, all commingle in a worship of devotion and love, and not of the Agamic pattern of ritualistic worship. This universality of worship at Kathirgāmam is what has given an intrinsic value and permanency to this Tamil poem, which celebrates the universally popular Deity of Kathiramalai as its hero.

Kathirgāmam is the quintessence of the Bhakti cult of Muruga. St. Nakkīrar sums up the highest form of worship of *Muruga* as representing the type of perennial youth, and immortalised in the Murugology of Kathirgāmam in the famous lines 101-102: "One face gleams with love and tenderness, at the slender waisted Vedha maid, the pure hearted Valli", whom the gnostics interpret as the human soul.

Muruga is worshipped in this Sanctum as the God of wisdom by those who seek spiritual enlightenment, as the god of sacrifice and ritual by ritualists, as the god of learning by scholars, as the giver of all boons, worldly and spiritual, by his devotees. Muruga would thus appear to be a power in whom are amalgamated many legends and traditions, many aspects of religion and modes of worship, primitive and advanced. He embodies the Hindu ideal of God immanent in all things and manifesting Himself wherever sought with love.

In the gloom of fear, His sixfold face doth gleam,  
In perils unbound, his lance betokens 'Fear not'—  
In the heart of those who recount His name  
He doth reveal His gracious Feet.  
Thus He appears to those who chant  
The hallowed name of 'Muruga'.

—Nakkīrar

### *Ceremonial Worship*

#### *The Perehera—The Festival Procession:*

The festival observed in the month of Esala (July), in the Devala attracts large crowds. In Kathirgāmam, the festival is commenced by bringing in procession a pole, and setting it up at the temple in a lucky hour. This is done by the Kapurāla. During the festival days, the insignia of a casket which is supposed to contain the "yantra" is taken in procession on a gaily caparisoned elephant on which sits the High Priest. It goes round the inner court of the temple and makes obeisance first at the Ganesa temple and with lighted torches and resonant music of

drums and bugles and dancers, it winds its way to the triangular outer court by the gated archway, and proceeds to the temple of Valli and returns after a brief tryst with her in her inner Sanctum. It is the eternal communion of Valli (Jivatma) with Skanda the (Paramatma) who seeks her out in a victory of faith.

Mysticism and the supernatural reach their climax during these days. Round and round the Devala pilgrims circumambulate with mouths gagged, silver arrow-headed pins piercing their lips or cheeks from end to end, or tongue pierced. With hooks pierced in his back, a pilgrim hangs from a beam or drags a decorated cart. Others measure their length on the burning sands, falling, rising and walking alternately. Mortification of the flesh and infliction of physical pain for atonement of and reparation from sins, and acquiring of spiritual salvation, are characteristic of the abundance of religious zeal at festival times at Kathirgāmam. Sacred and special to the God is the *Kāvadi*, the arched shoulder pole, gaily decorated with lustrous tinsel and coloured paper, adorned with bunches of the peacock feathers, which the devout pilgrim sports about on his shoulders, stepping and dancing to the tune of the drumming. The pilgrim carrying it, is invariably one who has taken a vow to do the pilgrimage on foot all the way. Mysticism underlies the wearing of the arrow-headed silver skewer by the devout votary. The faith is that a particular devotee is the chosen one of God Muruga for this investiture. The God appears in a dream enjoining on him to wear the insignia of the God, the Mudra.

The concluding stages of the festival are marked by the fire walking ceremony. Fire walking emblazons the annual festivals at a number of other shrines too in Sri Lanka, notably in the Draupadi Amman temple at Pāndrippu in the Eastern Province, and at Udappu near Chilaw. Fire walking is the expurgatory ceremonial at all these shrines, refining, chastening, and purifying everything evil by the performance of the ritual passage over fire. The ceremonial at Kathir-gāmam is among the most elaborate and spectacular of all, walking over an incandescent mass of embers raised by burning logs about fifteen feet long and four feet high. The leader, the Gini Pagana Sami, and the group of fire walkers proceed to the Manicka Ganga at dawn. After a bath in the stream, a procession starts for the temple led by the leader; they walk over the red hot cinders with faith in the God of Light and Wisdom as their only protection and armour.

The festival concludes with one of the chief ceremonies, the *Diyakepima*, when the insignia are taken to the Manicka Ganga in procession on elephants which are prepared and decorated for the occasion; and the Kapurāla and the elephants proceed to the middle of the stream. He cuts with the rankaduwa (golden sword) the water at the lucky hour. At that very instant the goblet pima of the previous year is re-filled and taken back in procession to the Devala.

It is customary for the votaries to dip themselves in the pond or stream immediately after the *Diyakepima*. This is a service obligatory on the votaries, after the conclusion of the water-cutting ceremony.

*Legends of Kathirgāmam**The Bo-Tree at Kathirgāmam:*

We give extracts from the *Mahāvamsa* relating to the planting of the Bō Sapling at Kajragama, as this is considered the “Sthala-Vrksha”—the sacred tree associated with a temple. We can see the Bo-Tree with its spreading branches on the back courtyard of the main temple of Muruga and even today, many devotees do *pradakshina*, prostrating by falling, rising and walking alternately round this tree, and puja is offered daily.

“The great Thero Mahinda and the bhikkhini Sangamitta went thither with their following and the king also with his following. The nobles of Kajragama and the nobles of Candanagama and the Brahman Tivakka and the people too who dwelt in the island came thither also by the power of the gods, with minds eagerly set upon a festival of the great Bodhi tree. Amid this great assembly plunged into amazement by this miracle, there grew out of the east branch, even as they gazed, a faultless fruit.

“This having fallen off, the Thero took it up and gave it to the king to plant. In a golden vase filled with earth mingled with perfumes, placed on the spot where the Mahasana (afterwards) was, the ruler planted it. And while they all yet gazed, there grew springing from it, eight shoots; and they stood there, young Bodhi trees four cubits high.

“When the king saw the young Bodhi trees, he, with senses all amazed, worshipped them by the gift

of a white parasol and bestowed royal consecration on them.

"Of the eight Bodhi saplings, one was planted at the landing place Jambukola, on the spot where the great Bodhi tree had stood, after leaving the ship; one in the village of the Brahmin Tivakka, one more in the Thuparama, one in the Issarasamanarama, one in the court of the first thupa, one in the arama of the Cetiya-Mountain, one in *Kajragama* and one in *Candanagama*. But the other thirty-two Bodhi saplings which sprang from four (later) fruits (were planted) in a circle, at a distance of a yojana, here and there in the viharas."

(*Mahavamsa* Ch. 19. Verses 53 to 63.)

Tradition has it that King Dutugemunu in the second century B.C. built the present shrine in fulfilment of a vow commemorating his successful expedition against King Elara (205-161 B.C.). Round this episode has grown the Sinhala folk poem "Kanda Mala"—Garland for Skanda, opening with a narration of the coming of the God to Lanka. "God Śiva once told his sons Kanda Kumaru (Skanda Kumara) and Ganidu (Ganesa), that he would give a mango to whoever would first encircle the three worlds. Skanda started off on his golden peacock to carry out the adventure to the very letter. Ganesa cleverly encircled Isvara, saying that the God in himself constituted the three worlds. Śiva was so pleased that he gave the mango to Ganesa. Skanda returning was so enraged that he delivered a well aimed blow at Ganesa, who rolled down breaking one of his tusks,



Śiva banished Skanda, who coming to the world of mortals took his abode at Kataragama of South Ceylon.

"Prince Dutugemunu preparing for a final assault against the Tamil King Elara was warned in a dream not to embark on the expedition, unless he secured the divine aid of the God of Kataragama. Appearing in a dream to his devotees is among the notable features of the cult of this particular divinity. No time was lost to do the trek to Kataragama, 'where the river flowed with water, though no rain fell', in the words of Kanda Mala. Miracles are yet another feature of the supernatural here, and many are the miracles which are part of the chronicles of Kataragama. The Prince reaching Kataragama went through severe penances for divine blessing. Lost in meditation, the Prince fainted and recovering consciousness, the great God stood before him and conferred on the Royal suppliant, the boon he had sought. The Prince recovered sufficiently to make a vow that on his return from victory, he would rebuild and endow the temple. On defeating Elara, Dutugemunu recovered the throne and fulfilled his vow."

#### *The Miracle of Sage Sikandi:*

There was a Devarishi by name Sikandi who was very much interested in the Tamil language and was doing severe penance in Tiruvengadagiri to obtain the grace of Lord Subrahmanya, the great Teacher of Teachers, the Parama Acharya of the sweet Tamil tongue. Lord Mahadeva adorned with matted lock and serpents appeared before the Rishi in the form of Kumara with Valli and Devayanai on either side

and mounted on His favourite peacock. He addressed the sage and declared that he was very much pleased with his penance and was ready to grant him any boon he desired. The sage begged for a thorough knowledge of all aspects of Tamil. The Lord of Kathirgāmam in answer, directed him to go to His disciple Agastya residing in the Podiya hill and that Agastya was alone competent to reveal the beauty of the Tamil language.

Accordingly, the sage learnt all the subtle and intricate aspects of Tamil, and from Jayantakumar, born of Anakulan Pandya and Tilottama, he learnt all the subtle effects of music and melody. Jayantakumar also composed in this connection a book on music (*Isainunakkam*).

Then the sage, both from his own desire and at the behest of Agastya started on a pilgrimage to Kathirgāmam. The disciples also joined him in the pilgrimage. When they had reached the forest near Kathirgāmam, a wild elephant appeared on the scene and obstructed their march and threatened to kill them.

The pilgrims in their extreme fright took shelter at the feet of Sikandi and begged for protection. The sage Sikandi, meditating on Lord Shanmuga in his heart and uttering the mantra of six letters, plucked a betel leaf nearby and prayed that this leaf should become the lance, Vēl, even as Lord Muruga destroyed all the enemies of God by a mere straw. Thereupon the Lord who is ever gracious to His sincere devotees actually converted the betel leaf into a terrible Vēl

which destroyed the mad elephant and cleared the way and removed all fear from the pilgrims. When the elephant fell down dead, there appeared a beautiful figure and bowing to the sage declared that owing to the curse of Brihaspati for disobeying his injunctions, he was turned into an elephant and suffered for a long time in that form. But by the grace of a great devotee of Muruga and by the touch of the miraculous pān turned into Vēl, he had become free from the curse.

Then the sage and his followers bathed in the Manicka Ganga and worshipped Lord Muruga from outside, and did penance praying to the Lord for His grace and the vision of His true form. The Lord graciously revealed His form and blessed the devotees. Thereupon they returned to the Podiya hills. From this time onwards the pious devotees and poets began to praise this miracle of the leaf-lance.

This miracle has been described in *Jeevakachintamani*, the famous epic of the third Sangam Age, and written by Tiruthaka Devar, a Jain Poet. The story is of great interest to prove the antiquity of Muruga worship in Sri Lanka and South India and it establishes a link with the legend of Agastya claimed to be the earliest Bard of Tamil Poesy, dating to the Second Academy of Letters in the history of Tamil culture.

CANZONES ON MURUGA-KUMARA  
SRI SUBRAHMANYA BHUJANGAM

By

Srimat Sankara Bhagavatpāda

This canticle is addressed to Lord Subrahmanya, known also as *Sentil Murugan*, in the most famous of Muruga shrines at Tiruchendur, in the south-east coast of India, off the district of Tirunelveli. Ādi Sankara composed the thirty-three verses of this poem in the peculiar *Bhujanga* metre, noted for its gentle and gliding movement of a serpent and for its being full of spiritual exaltation and piety.

The illustrious author who is one of the renowned exponents of Advaita Philosophy visited Tiruchendur in the course of his wide travels. As he sat before the sanctuary of the six-faced Skanda-Murti, he became absorbed in the ineffable glow of His Divine Presence in his heart, and filled with ecstatic devotion, he burst into song. *Subrahmanya Bhujangam* reveals the efficacy of meditation, praise and prayer to Lord Subrahmanya and is considered as a hymn (*stotra*) of imperishable value.

Sri Sankara calls upon all seekers to share his wondrous experience and to adore the Lord with six faces and twelve arms. He is the absolute ruler over all the cosmic forces; He is the *Devasenapati* or the heroic leader of the celestial Gods, including Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra and he is also the hidden propeller of the soul force of man. The poem holds out the hope that those who chant it daily with devotion shall win His Grace. A life of plenitude and felicity on earth and final beatitude after death is assured, and Sri Sankara's main purpose is to guide every seeker to God-realisation, which is the grand finale of human existence.

Tradition avows that Sri Sankara was suffering from an incurable disease and undergoing great pain, when he was directed in a dream to visit Tiruchendur's famous shrine of Muruga. He came to this place and sang this hymn and was fully recovered. He inspires in this poem to arise from the sense slumber of ignorance, and to *praise Him, pray to Him and meditate on Him*. The goal of *Skanda-Sayujyam* or union with the Lord awaits the seeker. The author reveals the supreme splendour, glory and infinity of Subrahmanya at two levels in his hymns. There is an outer or external power or force at work in the universe, whereby man can witness Muruga's cosmic greatness. Behold, the sacred shrine of Tiruchendur is one such fitting abode of His, with its hills and foreshore on which huge waves continually beat in, with the temple facing the sea. There is also an inner or internal power hidden and at work in the heart of man, wherein the Lord activates all movement of life and over-

poweringly vouchsafes grace on all alike. He is the nearest and dearest friend of man.

In an exalted mood of devotion, Sri Sankara first invokes Sri Ganesa whose temple is in the vicinity of the Muruga temple at Tiruchendur. Sri Ganesa, the elephant-faced God in the form of Dundi Ganapathy, shall remove all impediments that obstruct the path of the seeker, in his search for Life's summum bonum.

“May the ever young Ganesa,  
Freer of all obstacles,  
Elephant-faced and dear to  
Five-faced Śiva, adored by  
Creator Brahma and Indra,  
The benevolent and auspicious One,  
Endow me with bounteous gain”.

Like the poet, St. Nakkīrar in *Tirumurugarrupadai* of the classical age of Tamil literature, who sang in praise of Lord Muruga, Ādi Sri Sankara also depicts the pathways to Him, through meditation, adoration, and supplication, in this poem sung some thirteen hundred years ago. In intense meditation before the divine presence of Subrahmanya, Sri Sankara felt the supreme peace and poise and he gives spontaneous expression to his unpremeditated love.

I know not the elements of poetic art,  
Neither the excellencies of sense and sound  
Yet in the ineffable glow of Thy Holy Presence,  
I felt the light of the One Intelligence  
Gleaming in the six-faced form and Lo!  
These verses of intense ardour came to birth. (2)



Who is He? What is He like? Sri Sankara admonishes the pathfinder to withdraw the mind from its capricious distractions and to fix it on the great abode of the Lord. He therefore portrays the sacred city of Tiruchendur and its environs, and draws attention to the roaring sea, the scattered hills and caves that surround the temple, where the centrifugal majestic Lord Shanmuga radiates His light.

Majestically mounting the peacock,  
He's the essence of the mystic formula:  
Enchanting His mien, dweller in the hearts of  
seers,  
The subject is He, extolled by Devas and priests,  
The son of Mahadev, Guardian of the Universe!  
Thus do I magnify Him. (3)

Whene'er shall men come to my abode,  
Thenceforth shall they cross yonder sea,  
Free from fear, safe and secure—  
He who proclaims thus bides on the coastal  
shrine,  
In serene splendour and peerless purity—  
This son of divine Mother do I praise. (4)

Behold, the high waves rising in succession  
Glide shoreward, melting in froth and foam;  
So too, shall wanton wiles of worldly strife  
That threaten to engulf sojourners at every step  
Prove ineffective to worshippers in my seagirt  
shrine.

He who thus points to the waves and dwells in  
my heart,  
Him shall I meditate for e'er in the core of my  
heart. (5)

In the last two verses, the great preceptor of Advaitic monism declares to the world at large, that the all-pervasive Lord, who is also the indweller in the innermost sanctuary of the heart of every mortal man, and who listens to the still sad music of humanity, beckons from the foreshore of his hallowed shrine, to one and all who are heavy laden, to come unto Him, and that He shall calm their tempestuous ills and perils, and lead them to the haven of eternal bliss. This was the rare moment of realisation when Sri Sankara worshipped in the temple of Muruga at Tiruchendur and became immersed in the supreme awareness of the Lord, ever fresh and radiant, radiating power, so healing and exhilarating from the renowned sanctuary of the triumphant city of Jayantipura, another name for Tiruchendur, the sacrosanct abode which marked his victory over the forces of the mighty Surapadman, the inveterate foe of the Gods.

Lord Śiva is popularly depicted as dwelling on Mount Kailas. So his son Muruga too is depicted as abiding in high peaks and mountainous regions from where He showers His Grace. It behoves man to surmount all obstacles and breathe the pure air of devotion as he ascends into His presence. Sages and seers like Sanatkumar, Narada, Agastya, Brahma, Saraswathy and Indra worshipped Lord Subrahmanya and prayed for illumination on the inner essence of His glory, which confers ever sustaining bliss to his devotees. Thus do the scriptures declare that the Lord responded and assumed the form of "Shanmugam"—He with six faces, and taught the efficacy of His six-lettered name "Sa Ra Va Na Ba Va" Vidé

*Sri Subrahmanya Tatvam* by N. Subrahmanya Aiyer,  
pp. 47-55.

Sa confers the plenitude of Sri Lakshmi  
Ra gives the wealth of knowledge  
Va bestows the felicity of enjoyment  
Na protects from all forces of evil  
Ba ensures immortality  
Va confers the life of beatitude.

He who abides in the cave of Mount Sugandha,  
nestled

By the roaring sea, a favourite haunt of seers,  
Where ills of living beings and their five great  
sins

Get absolved, He who shines in His peerless  
Light,

I approach this Lord Guha, dweller in the cave of  
my heart. . . (7)

From the golden dais of His Garbhagraha—  
fragrant resting place,

Where His splendour outshines the lustre of a  
thousand suns,

The beseeching mortals gain His benediction

While Devas pay Him homage with the Kārtigai  
mothers,

This Kartikeyan do I contemplate ever and anon.  
(8)

The lotus of Thy roseate Feet, Oh Lord Skanda,  
So beauteous like the lotus bloom on which  
Swans delight, with nectar dripping, shall  
shelter be,

To the mind which like the bee wanders  
In the fearful scorching pool of Samsāra. (9)

Verses ten to fourteen of the poem delineate the special features of the Lord in His manifested form. His chest playing with Valli denotes His wisdom; the flame of His great love for his devotees makes His chest aglow. His hands are so mighty and endowed with immense powers and His faces appear matchless in effulgence with none of the dim spots of the moon. Non-pareil and incomparable in His appearance, the author draws deep inspiration by gazing into His beauteous form. (10-14)

Expansive, with elongating lashes are your eyes  
twelve,  
Ever shedding rays of beneficent grace—  
Be it a particle that falls on me just once,  
A flash of grace from the corner of thine eyes,  
I am blessed, and what's thy loss by this act of  
Thine? (15)

The Lord's eyes emit rays of beneficent grace. Once His ambrosial grace begins to flow, the devotee experiences the virtuous twelve qualities realised by saints. They are knowledge of the self, truthfulness, equanimity, inquiry, good-will, good conduct, forbearance, compassion, sacrifice, charity, control of sensuous desires, and fortitude. The author next dwells on the faces of Lord Muruga and imagines that they typify the great sayings proclaimed by the seers in the Vedas—*Aum Tat Sat, Aham Brahmasmi, Sarvam Brahmayam, Tat Tvam Asi.*

These revealed Truths bring out the nature of the relationship that exists between the soul of man and the Lord, and eliminate seeming barriers that separate the soul from the Lord.

"My child! Thou doth spring from my Being—  
May Thou be immortal"! so saying, Thy father  
The secret formula chants and caresses  
Thy six gem-crowned heads that endow all with  
well-being.

We prostrate before thy six heads, Lord of the  
Universe. (16)

From here, the author depicts in great detail the ornaments of Muruga and goes on to explain the significance of the greatness of His magic name. *Sa ra* is known as the Sakti-kāṇḍam, *va na* becomes the Kumara kāṇḍam and *ba va* are designated as the Saiva-kāṇḍam, and together constitute what is popularly known as the *Somaskanda* form of worship. It helps in meditation to focus on the *Child Muruga*, playing on the lap of the father or mother, and enjoying their limitless grace. (17-18)

Oh Kumara, son of Lord Śiva, Skanda Swamy,  
Guha, Leader of the army of devas, wielder of  
the lance

Sacred to Parasakti, Lover of the hunter's daughter Valli

Thou Lord who expungeth the ills of thy devotees,

Foe of the Titan Tārākāsuran, My God,  
Be Thou my solace. (19)

Herein the poet utters the eleven sacred names of the Lord Muruga and this is the secret invocation, known as *Kumāra Rahasya* in the Puranas which extol the potency of uttering this formula ceaselessly. He implores for His Grace to overcome the exuberance of the senses five and the sensations five, whereby the mind, ego, will, and the power of intelligence are brought under discriminate control. This verse is the *hṛdaya* sloka in this poem and brings out the quintessence of the faith in Muruga. We repeat the prayer of Sri Sankara:

Kumara! Son of the Śiva! dweller in the cave of the heart! Thou One who wert embraced by the Divine Mother! Commander of the celestials! Lord with the spear of knowledge in hand, and riding the peacock which symbolises the origin of form through its variegated colours! Beloved of Valli, the daughter of the hunter! protect me for ever, Oh Lord, who is the dispeller of the devotees' distress!

In melting pathos of singular piety, Sri Sankara calls upon Lord Subrahmanya in verses 20 to 22, to come to his aid in the last moments of his life on earth.

"When all external props fail me  
Be Thou my refuge . . . . .  
Come with thy lance, mounted on the peacock  
Bid me, fear not, when the messenger of Death  
Faces me . . . . ."

He assures the Lord that he will offer his constant supplication for his protection and prostrate at His



feet in the prime of his life, so that when he lies helpless in the hour of death, the Lord will heed his prayer—"Leave me not alone". In the same strain did St. Manickavasakar sing in the "Leave me not" canto in *Tiruvachakam*, reminding all mortals thereby that the sway of death exempts no man, and it is only the grace of God that can energise man in the days of his life on earth and be a tower of strength in the hour of death.

(20-22)

Thou who slayeth the kingly ruler of the Asuras,  
Surapadman, and his kin Tārākāsuran and Sim-  
hamugan—

Canst Thou not cure me of my afflictions many?  
They hide in the secret recess of my heart,  
If Thou dost not succour, where shall I go?  
What shall become of me?

If Thou could'st slay Surapadman and the two  
Chiefs

Whose cruel might pervaded this universe—

Will it be hard for Thee to kill this foe of mine—

My ignorance that afflicts sorely my mind?

To whom shall I turn for refuge? What shall  
become of me?

(23)

Is there a greater foe to man than distressing  
grief?

Oh, son of Uma, art Thou not our saviour?

None else shall I adore as my Lord God—

Dispel the gloom that gnaws at my heart strings  
And obstructs my devotion to Thee alone.

(24)

Oh, vanquisher of the asuric Titan, Tārākāsuran!  
Even the most dreaded maladies fatal

And evil powers of immense magnitude  
 Art quelled by Thy Holy Ash gleaming on the  
*Pannir*\* leaf,  
 In an instant do they vanish at the healing touch.  
 (25)

Grant Oh Skanda! That my eyes see Thy form  
 everywhere;  
 My ears ever listen to Thy fame, my tongue ever  
 utter  
 Thy purifying names, my hands ever consecrated  
 To Thy worship, my body ever to thy service  
 Dedicated, and my thoughts absorbed in thy con-  
 templation.  
 (26)

The Devas from their lokas confer their boons  
 On those only who duly worship them for favours  
 many,  
 Yet Thy Grace extends to all, even the outcast,  
 Thyself Thou givest and is there any such Lord  
 of mercy  
 As Thou art, Oh Guha, whose love is all embrac-  
 ing.  
 (27)

Oh, Kumāra, may my household, my wife  
 My children, my kith and kin, my cows  
 My friends so dear and all who belong to me  
 Endear themselves to Thee by prayer and wor-  
 ship,  
 May they ever hold Thee in remembrance.  
 (28)

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\* The pannir tree is the symbol of the Vedas, its leaves being the vedic mantras.

Thou who pierced the fierce Krauncha Mount of  
neisance,

Oh Shanmuga, will Thou not use Thy charmed  
lance

So penetrating and powerful to drive away  
The fearsome fatal powers that sway o'er my body,  
Be they birds or beasts or bacterial ailments fell.

(29)

Thou commander of the heavenly hosts! Do not  
The earthly father and mother forgive their err-  
ing sons?

Art Thou not the father of the universe and I,  
thy child?

Thou son of Parameswara, forbear my faults too,  
And vouchsafe Thy Grace to me, even me. (30)

Adoration to Thee, Lord Skanda; to the sea  
thou'rt facing,

To the seashore wherein Thou abidest, adoration.  
Adoration to Thy vehicles, the peacock and the  
ram;

To Thy banner bearing the cock, adoration to thy  
Saktis

And the Lance; Adoration to Thee and Thine  
again and again. (31)

Oh Subrahmanya! Thou bliss absolute, the ple-  
num,

The fountain spring of all other joys, Light of  
Lights,

Thou pure unlimited Intelligence, serene Peace:

All love to all living beings, source of freedom  
everlasting

May Thy beatific grace for ever illumine me!  
(32)

The last song in this canticle closes on a note of crescendo of promise—the goal of *Skanda-Sayujyam* (union with Him). This incantation on Lord Subrahmanya, who abides in the holy shrine at Tiruchendur has the slow zigzag rhythm of the serpentine movement, and has the power to confer the boon of felicity and longevity on earth, and heavenly communion with Him after death. It is a call to all lovers of Muruga to recite these divinely inspired verses with love and adoration, so that it acts as an efficacious panacea for all ills, of the body, mind and soul, of all mankind. That He is not the God of one chosen race or land, but that He is the goal of the universe, is the theme of this melodious poem. The truth of the One without form assuming the manifested form of Subrahmanya in the hearts of His devotees, is the central teaching in this song of songs. (33)

Sang St. Arunagiri, the illustrious poet of the odes on Muruga, on this aspect of the Lord:

“That cannot be seen, with and without form;  
That cannot be expressed, yet it doth speak;  
That is the end and goal of the visible vedas.  
That which dwells in the five elements, bonds  
and bodies;  
That which deludes the sensations five;

Yet it doth parade as the Self of self, growing  
As the world with all its diversity and polarity  
It fills everywhere as the prodigious grace—  
That art Thou."

Sri Sankara seems to point out the *path* whereby to attain this union—*sayujya*—as his chief aim is to guide us to God-experience which is the priceless purpose of human existence; the path being through *Meditation, Praise, Prayer and Adoration*. The divine song takes us step by step from the external to the internal, and from the outer ritualistic worship to that of the inner offerings of silent awareness and contemplation.

We get a penetrating glimpse in these thirty three verses into the spiritual experience of Sri Sankara and he bids us partake of that experience, holding us firmly by the staff of his intense devotion at every step. The Kumara he extols in *Subrahmanya Bhujangam* is not only the Lord of the vedic rites (Mahadeva Deva) but also the import of the great proclamations of the Vedas which stress the identity of the Absolute and the individual soul (Mahavakya Guha).

## TIRUPUGAZH

By

ST. ARUNAGIRINATHAR

*The Prophet of the Modern Age*

St. Arunagirinathar's *Tirupugazh* and his other mellifluous poems on Muruga mark an important landmark in the revival of the cult of Muruga in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries, following the epoch of the codification of the Meikanda Sastras by the exponents of the tenets of Saivism known as Saiva Siddhantam. In his garland of praise, St. Arunagiri combines the high import of Saiva Siddhantam with the traditional concept of Muruga worship, and this vibration has been sustained through the hymns of Thayumana Swami, Ramalinga Swamigal and Pamban Adigal right up to the modern times.

St. Arunagiri in the footsteps of the Saiva Nayanmars of old also sang at every Muruga shrine that he visited; he revitalised the worship of Muruga and enthused piety and fervour among the common masses. He revolutionised the technique of Tamil prosody and devised an original *chandam* metre with intricate timebeat and euphony so that music and poesy mingled in a symphony of praise to Muruga.

In his dynamic and jubilant *Tirupugazh*, by means of material devices and rhythm, he conveyed the buoy-



ancy of the worshippers of Muruga, as was done in the earlier ages by means of dances known as Verriadal, Vallikuttu and Kuravaykuttu. His was a clarion call to the people to resist the pitfalls in the spiritual life, and steer clear of the evils of envy, lust, greed, and self-love and to hold fast to the redeeming saviour, Muruga, the Divine Child, preceptor and the One Reality in a world of multiplicity.

St. Arunagirinathar recognises the different modes of approach to Muruga who in his diverse forms can be realised by true seekers, according to their own spiritual level of attainment. The four pathways of Sariyai, Kriyai, Yogam and Jnanam have been clearly illustrated in his poems as leading to the goal of Muruga—Realisation. The ways of the world and the means to liberation are brought out vividly in his appealing sonatas which take up the chorus of chanting the love of Muruga who permeates every particle of being.

In one of his last and immortal poems, *Kandar Anubhuti*, he has traced the stages of attainment of the final beatitude of bliss. That all avenues of knowledge, will and action can be transformed by the supreme act of surrender to Muruga, the great lover of Valli, till the soul realises Oneness with him in supreme Silence, is his message.

St. Arunagirinathar's experiences, 'Pesā anubhuti piranthathuve'—'Avané ṭané'—'That you become one with Him'—have been acclaimed with certitude as the voice of Truth by St. Thayumanavar, an illustrious poet of Tamil Nadu in the modern times. "Beloved Father Arunagiri! Who hast uttered such words of sublime Truth as Thou?"

## TIRUPUGAZH

Oh Lord Kumara! War God Muruga! The  
Supreme Being of the renowned Palani Hills!

Oh Ye partner of Valli—The Kurava Maiden  
of the hunter class before whom you sent the  
fierce elephant to frighten her.

Oh Ye who waged war and freed the Devas  
from their troubles by destroying the Asu-  
ras.

Oh Ye Lord resplendent with virtue, beaute-  
ous is thy javelin (the weapon) and thy  
peacock (the chariot).

This is my prayer to thee, my Lord—

Bless me with wisdom to free myself from lone-  
liness,

Let me think of thy lotus Feet,

The Feet comparable to the faultless gem of eme-  
rald and gold.

May the relentless God of Death not bind me  
By throwing his twisted rope around my neck,  
May he not divide me from kinsmen, home,  
wealth and kingdom mine. (1)

Oh Son of Siva—the great Preceptor of true  
wisdom

Who by his mere smile burnt the three forts of  
the Asuras

Who by his mere look burnt Manmatha, the god  
of love with the sugar-cane bow,

Oh Son of Siva who doth dance to the chant of  
Vishnu with Lakshmi and Brahma with Saras-  
wathi.

Oh Ye who was moved by the distress of Indra,  
God of the Devas,

And brought to dust crores of Asuras with Thy  
lance—the symbol of divine wisdom.

Oh Lord of Palani where the Vedas hail Thee  
as the consort of Valli—the happy maid of the  
hunter class.

In this world people of different creeds do not  
understand each other;

Nor are they steadfast and clear in their values  
and beliefs.

In the belief that this body is imperishable, they  
perpetrate vices until they are overpowered by  
Yama.

They become subject to the law of cause and  
effect, birth and death.

If this be the drama of the world, I pray that  
Thou grant me

Thy sacred ash and guide me to the goal of Wis-  
dom at Thy Feet. (2)

Thou art the incomparable Being who shines as  
the Absolute,

Inexpressible Essence of the Vedas, Supreme  
Wisdom,

Truth embodied in the Saiva cult.

Thou Light Divine, devoid of dualism and poten-  
tial entity;

Thou who sprouts out of this embryonic world,  
Revealing thy existence everywhere as life, body  
and knowledge.

Thou who art the word, the beginning, the middle and the end of religious systems six,  
And of the Vedas which embody the virtuous life.  
Thou who art pure bliss and supreme felicity who imparts

Delicious nectar of happiness, like water rushing out of a fountain—

Thou who art with the lance in Thy hand,  
Oh Thou great preceptor, so luminous and embodiment of Om—

The pranava mantra of triple wisdom.

Thou dancest in the vast worlds with tinkling anklets

Resounding in thy holy feet and radiant like the sun's rays.

Thou art the valiant rider on the majestic and victorious peacock.

Oh Lord of devas! Subrahmanya divine!

Thou brilliant supreme Being who dwells on Mount Palani,

Which is itself the mantra—*Saravanabava*—

The mantra which thy humble devotees chant in good faith,

In their heart of hearts as truly efficacious. (3)

Oh Ye with form lustrous like gold with shining holy ash!

Oh Ye with the Vel! Rider on the beautiful blue peacock!

Oh son of Uma! Ye who doth discharge thy matchless lance glowing

Like a *vadava* fire, and destroyed not only the mean Asuras but also my evil tendencies in toto.

Oh Ye brother of Ganesa—the elephant-faced god  
who killed

Gajamuga Asura, when he came to fight with  
great fury.

Oh Ye who reside on the lovely Palani hills,  
The peaks of which touch the firmament itself.  
Oh Ye Lord Muruga who granted the prayers of  
Brahma Deva!

These are thy meek devotees who take shelter  
under the flowery feet of thy devout saints,  
Who by their noble religious austerities became  
wise,

Who besmear the sacred ashes on their body,  
Uttering six times the holy mantra of Arumu-  
gham.

If these thy lowly devotees who daily pray be-  
fore thee,

Calling thee as Guha with the peacock chariot,  
And as Saravana who appeared in the pond, girt  
by kusa grass—

Devotees who perceive that any greatness on their  
part is really

Thy greatness—If they place their grievance be-  
fore thee,

And ask thee why they should be bound by fears  
and cares—

Heed their complaints, else who will praise Thee,  
And what shall become of the holy Vedas?

(4)

Oh! Ye who in the battle field with thy lance  
knocked off the heads of the contending Asuras,  
And caused the vast ocean itself to roar in  
distress,

And crushed to dust the big Krauncha Mount!  
Oh! Ye kinsman of the lotus-eyed Vishnu who  
sleeps sweetly on the serene serpent bed,  
Oh! Ye the Son of Lord Siva with the poison-  
sucked throat.  
Oh! Ye the Lord of Palani Hills where the Devas  
resort for worship,  
Heed Thou my prayer to Thee!  
If I should have another birth, though I dread it  
as the fear of the deep ocean, like hell itself;  
Let not my birth be defective in senses or be  
stung by penury.  
Bless me with a fine physique, notable birth and  
high wisdom.  
Be gracious to take me and my vacillating mind  
as your vassal. (5)



## KANDAR ALANKARAM

By

*St. Arunagirinathar*

- (3) The Lord of divine Valli whose words excel in  
Sweetness, honey and sugar taught me one day  
The real, real One, but how to describe it?  
It is neither ether nor air, neither fire nor water  
Nor earth, neither self nor ego, neither form  
nor formless?
- (8) Oh six-faced Teacher, Thou did'st  
Clearly reveal that sweet unique bliss  
That matured in love on the summit of the  
Lofty mountain of knowledge; Its light  
Pierced the solitude of the Void—  
The void of endless infinity.
- (10) Behold the Valiant Lancer's (Murugan) might!  
He grants me access into the realm of pure  
being,  
Where all is void and silence reigns.  
Behold the might of the Lord with towering  
shoulders,  
He who communes with Valli, the mountain  
maid  
Whose lips are red like Kovai fruits whose  
songs

Art tuned to the sweet strains of the hill-folk.

- (16) Curb your desire and subdue your anger;  
Always give charity and be your self and be still.

Then the grace of the Lord Muruga, who,  
To redeem all worlds, hurls the sharp spear  
Scattering the furious titan's mountain  
Fastness, shall descend and save you.

- (17) Oh Mind, having taken refuge at the  
Anklet and flower-adorned Lotus Feet  
Of the beautiful Lancer of Vedas and Agamas—  
Go now, and be naught, hiding in the  
Open vastness, where there's neither day nor  
night  
Nor any deception—Unknown is this way to  
any man.

- (61) The Faultless Lancer having destroyed  
The Mountain-Ego and dried up the ocean  
To cut off the Titan's heads of evil.  
Behold! He taught me ever to abide  
In the Vision that is free from elements five;  
Free from words and thoughts, body and mind,  
Free from darkness and free from I-ness.

- (73) That One, which knows neither going nor  
coming,  
Neither night nor day, neither outside nor  
inside,  
Neither speech nor form, overpowers again and  
again  
And subdues the mind, Oh Arumugava!  
It makes me its own. Such beatitude  
Inexpressible! Oh bliss so ineffable!

# KANDAR ANUBHUTI

By

SAINT ARUNAGIRINATHAR

*Realisation of Kandar's Grace*

Kandar —

He of six parts (Kanda) or aspects, faces and known as Arumugam or Kandan.

Anubhuti —

A boon or blessing from the Supreme being connected with or leading to the experience of bliss, divine knowledge, favour, or grace — Superhuman knowledge obtained from Siva or to become one in experience. The intrinsic nature of the Self is its present contemporaneity with whatever has been or will be.

“Sicut erat in principio, et nunc  
Et semper in Saecula Saeculorum.”

*Meaning of the Title:*

The Luminous Eye of Grace sent out six sparks which were taken by Fire, Wind and the Waters of the Ganges to Saravana Lake where the Son Kumara emerged as six faced and twelve armed Skanda or Kanda from the embrace of Siva-Sakti. She brought together the six babes into one form known as "Kandan". Thus *Kandar Anubhuti* signifies the divine knowledge realised by becoming one with Kandan. St. Arunagirinathar embodies in this poem the illumined wisdom of experience with the Supreme Muruga which is known as the wisdom of Grace. The wisdom of the Absolute is known as Pathi Jnanam. Muruga is said to confer this boon of bliss.

*Invocation to Lord Ganapathi*

Even the stony heart melts in love as it yearns  
To relish the Grace of Shanmuga; that this  
Beauteous garland be praiseworthy  
The elephant-faced Ganesa I invoke.

*Kandar Anubhuti**Sections*

## (1)

That I may sing in praise and meditate on  
The lovely peacock, the lance and cock, grant thy  
grace,  
Thou brother of the elephant-faced one  
Who slew the Titan with the elephant face.

## (2)

Oh Muruga, art Thou not bliss and truth  
And wisdom of those who think,  
Speak and act? Lord of heaven and earth,  
Convey the felicity of serene surrender supreme.

## (3)

That secret Reality Oh six-faced One—  
Is it ether, water, earth, fire or air?  
Is it the dawn of knowledge, or the four Vedas?  
Is it the mind, the ego, or the very state  
In which Thou made me thy serf?

## (4)

Oh Lancer, who crushed the chest of Suran  
Charging with his hosts; who transfixed the Mount  
By the victorious Lance—Is it befitting  
That Thou savest me not from attachments  
strong?

## (5)

Why do I not entreat by holy psalms  
The six-faced One to relieve my confusion  
Caused by lure of worldly possessions?  
He is the Supreme One who can root out for ever,  
The veiled delusion of this enigmatic world.

## (6)

In obeisance, Thou bideth Valli's will  
To serve her, O infinite love and Grace.  
On the impervious rock of my heart-pool  
Will not thy unopen'd Lotus Feet bloom forth?

## (7)

Oh mind that perisheth! List to the imperishable goal!

Give without reserve. Ponder on the beauteous Lancer's Feet! Set your pangs of life and burdens on fire;

Nay, crumble them to dust! Give up, give up sinful actions.

## (8)

Lo, the chaos of I-ness and that of kith and kin Wert effaced, when Thou expressed the Truth divine.

Oh Thou Kumaran, Son of Uma of Himavat, Vanquisher of the titanic forces of evil.

## (9)

When shall I escape from the net of lust,  
Entangled as I am with bewitching maids?  
Oh Thou Fierce One who pierced the Mount  
With the Lance, overcoming all obstacles  
Thou who art beyond fear and sorrow.

## (10)

Thy chest with garlands adorned, O Lancer!  
Who destroyed the arch-enemy of Indra—  
The Asura in the form of an upturned mango tree.  
When Yama comes mounted on a black buffalo  
Come Thou on the peacock and grant thy vision.

## (11)

Oh Lancer who dwelleth in the Naga hills.  
Thou who bestoweth the gift of four kinds of  
poesy.



How shall I declare thy revelation of Truth?  
Thou should save me in my last sojourn  
When kith and kin wail and howl aloud.

(12)

Valliamma's heart and soul  
With one word He took away.  
Unborn Murugan, immortal One!  
Be still, bide in silence! In this way  
He opened for me vistas immeasurable.  
I know not that great secret.

(13)

That Truth Thou art without form or essence,  
Without being or non-being, beyond light and  
darkness.  
How cans't Thou be known except  
By thy Grace? Oh Mind! invoke Him as.  
The Sage who wields the Lance of wisdom,  
Who art indeed the Guru, Lord Murugan.

(14)

Having attained the feet of Muruga, carrying  
The shining spear, thus blessed, O mind! give up  
Give up touch, taste, sight, smell, and hearing.  
The five tools which storm the citadel of actions.

(15)

Oh Glorious Guru, worshipped devoutly by  
The valiant heroes in war and illustrious on earth,  
Who art encompassed by eight attributes;  
When wilt thou vouchsafe thy grace?  
In melting love I call upon Thee in adoration.

(16)

O valiant Hero! Thou terrible one who wields  
Thy lance to subjugate Sura, the old foe.  
Thou ruler paramount of the world of Devas  
Is it fitting that afflicted by inordinate desire,  
I should languish without realising Thee.

(17)

All our learning, our knowledge entire,  
The Lancer bestowed that it be turned over to  
Him—  
Bereft of carnal love and filled with good deeds,  
Let those in unison with Truth divine  
Continue for e'er to praise Thee ceaselessly.

(18)

Unborn, Immortal, ineffable, unforgetting,  
Inscrutable to Brahma and Vishnu,  
Thou Son of immaculate Siva,  
Peerless Splendour, stainless Perfection,  
Fearless One, Guardian of Amaravathi!

(20)

Oh, all-pervading one, powerful, entrancing,  
Thou primeval object of worship by Gods,  
Thou guardian of the heavenly spheres.  
'Tis wonderous the way you initiated me,  
In the true secret so rare indeed to attain.

(28)

Oh Thou in the form of grace ambrosia!  
Lord of the pointed lance—Abode of Wisdom  
Is it possible to express that Supreme  
Secret, which is the state where the ego ceased  
To exist merged in the pure Self eternal?

(30)

'Tis the way which the Lancer (Muruga)  
Shining like the crimson dawn points—  
How can one comprehend that which is incom-  
parable!

Will the knower ever know That art Thou?  
That mystery can ne'er be imparted?

(42)

The unique Lancer gave the initiation,  
In that way to tread. To know that Supreme  
Secret (sign) He pointed it out without  
Pointing; worldly bondage destroyed,  
Words and thoughts, knowledge  
And ignorance too were destroyed.

(43)

Oh mighty Lover of our Lady wearing flawless  
Gems and silken dress, Oh Muruga!  
When through thy love and grace  
The bonds of desire become dust—  
Such ineffable experience is born.

(48)

Oh, Lancer, who revels with rejoicing votaries,  
Who is free from the fetters of bondage,  
Who comes to dispel the gloom of darkness—  
Art Thou not the Lord who is inseparable?  
Art Thou not the knowledge of the knowers?

(49)

To know that which abides in itself in utter  
Aloneness: can it be imparted to anyone else?  
O Lord of the flashing spear, that scatters  
The fears of thy devotees, O Bright One,  
Enwrap me by thy Grace.

SRI SUBRAHMANYA ASHTOTTARA SATA  
NĀMĀVALI

*Nandikeswarar gave this Incantation to Sage Agastya*

1. AUM Skandāye Namaha:  
Hail Skanda! vanquisher of the mighty  
foes.
2. AUM Guhāye Namaha:  
Praise be to the Invisible Lord—He who  
abides in the hearts of devotees true.
3. AUM Shanmugāye Namaha:  
Praise be to the six-faced one.
4. AUM Bāla Nētrasuthāye Namaha:  
Praise be to the Son of the Three-Eyed  
Siva.
5. AUM Prabavē Namaha:  
Praise be to the Lord Supreme.
6. AUM Pingalāye Namaha:  
Praise be to the golden-hued one.
7. AUM Krittigāsunavé Namaha:  
Hail to the Son of the Starry maids.
8. AUM Sihi Vahanāye Namaha:  
Hail to the rider on the peacock.

9. AUM Dhvishatbhujāye Namaha:  
Hail to the Lord with the twelve hands.
10. AUM Dhvishatnēthrāye Namaha:  
Hail to the Lord with twelve eyes.
11. AUM Saktitharāye Namaha:  
Hail to the wielder of the Lance.
12. AUM Pisidāsaprapancha Nāye Namaha:  
Praise be to the destroyer of the Asuras.
13. AUM Tārakāsūrā Samhārine Namaha:  
Praise be to the slayer of Tārakāsuran.
14. AUM Rakshopala Vimarthanāye Namaha:  
Praise be to the Victor of the Asuric  
forces.
15. AUM Māthāye Namaha:  
Praise be to the Lord of felicity.
16. AUM Pramathāye Namaha:  
Praise be to the Lord of bliss.
17. AUM Unmathāye Namaha:  
Hail Oh passionate One.
18. AUM Sura Sainya Surakshakāye Namaha:  
(Suralangasya Rakshithre Namaha);  
Hail Saviour of the Devas.
19. AUM Devasenāpatāyē Namaha:  
Hail Commander of the Heavenly hosts.
20. AUM Prāgnāye Namaha:  
Hail, Lord of Wisdom.
21. AUM Kripālavē Namaha:  
Hail Compassionate One.
22. AUM Bhaktavatsalāye Namaha:  
Lover of devout ones, Praise be to Thee.



23. AUM Umāsuthāye Namaha:  
Son of Uma—Praise be to Thee.
24. AUM Saktitharāye Namaha:  
OH mighty Lord—Praise be to Thee.
25. AUM Kumārāye Namaha:  
Lord of eternal youth—Praise be to Thee.
26. AUM Kraunca tāranāye Namaha:  
He who reft asunder the Kraunca Mount—  
Praise be to Thee.
27. AUM Sēnānyé Namaha:  
Praise be to the Army Chief.
28. AUM Agnijanmané Namaha:  
To the effulgence of Fire, all Hail.
29. AUM Visākhāye Namaha:  
To Him who shone on the Astral Visaka—  
All Hail.
30. AUM Sankarāthmajāye Namaha:  
Thou Son of Sankara—All Hail.
31. AUM Sivaswaminé Namaha:  
Thou Preceptor of Siva—All Hail.
32. AUM Ganaswaminé Namaha:  
On Lord of the "Ganas"—All Hail.\*
33. AUM Sarva Swaminé Namaha:  
Thou Lord, God Almighty, All Hail.
34. AUM Sanāthanāye Namaha:  
Oh Lord eternal, Praise be to Thee.
35. AUM Anantasaktāyē Namaha:  
Thou potent Lord, Praise be to Thee.

\* Ganas—attendants of Siva.

36. AUM Akshopiyāye Namaha:  
Unstained by arrows art Thou—Praise be  
to Thee.
37. AUM Parvathīpriya Nandanāye Namaha:  
Thou beloved of Parvati, Praise be to Thee.
38. AUM Gangasūthāye Namaha:  
Oh, son of Goddess Ganga—Praise be to  
Thee.
39. AUM Sarōth Buthāye Namaha:  
Hail Thou who did'st nestle in the Sara-  
vanai Lake.
40. AUM Pāvakātmajāye Namaha:  
Hail Thou who art born of Fire.
41. AUM Āhuthāye Namaha: (Ātmapuve Namaha):  
Hail Thou Unborn Lord.
42. AUM Agnigarbhāye Namaha:  
Hail Thou who dost sustain the fire.
43. AUM Samigarbhāye Namaha:  
Hail Thou who arose out of the Vanni flame.  
(Fire of the Suma tree).
44. AUM Visvarēthasé Namaha:  
Thou glory of the Absolute Paramasivam,  
All Hail.
45. AUM Surārigné Namaha:  
Oh, Subduer of the foes of the Devas, All  
Hail.
46. AUM Hiranyavarnāye Namaha:  
Thou resplendent One, All Hail.
47. AUM Subhākruthé Namaha:  
Thou Auspicious One—All Hail.

48. AUM Vasumathé Namaha:  
Thou Oh Splendour of the Vasus—(a class  
of Gods) All Hail.
49. AUM Vadavēshapruthé Namaha:  
Praise be to Thee, Oh lover of celibacy.
50. AUM Trumbāye Namaha:  
Praise be to Thee, Oh Peerless One.
51. AUM Prajrubāye Namaha:  
Praise be to thee Auspicious One. (Blissful).
52. AUM Ujrubāye Namaha:  
Praise be to the Invincible One.
53. AUM Kamalāsana Samsthāye Namaha:  
Praise be to the Lord extolled by Brahma.
54. AUM Ekavarnāye Namaha:  
The one Word art Thou—All Hail.
55. AUM Dvivarnāye Namaha:  
In Two Art Thou—All Hail.
56. AUM Trivarnāye Namaha:  
Thou Art the Three—All Hail.
57. AUM Chaturvarnāye Namaha:  
In four Art Thou—All Hail.
58. AUM Panchavarnāye Namaha:  
In five letters Art Thou—All Hail.
59. AUM Prajāpathayé Namaha:  
Father of all Creation—All Hail.
60. AUM Booshané Namaha:  
Thou Luminous Sun—All Hail.
61. AUM Kapasthayé Namaha:  
Thou Effulgence divine, All Hail.

62. AUM Kahanāye Namaha:  
Thou Omniscient One—All Hail.
63. AUM Chandra Varnāye Namaha:  
Thou radiance of the Moon  
—Praise be to Thee.
64. AUM Kalātharāye Namaha:  
Thou who adorns the crescent—Praise  
be to Thee.
65. AUM Mayatharaye Namaha:  
Energy Art Thou—Praise be to Thee.
66. AUM Mahāmāyiné Namaha:  
Great Delusion too art Thou, Praise be to  
Thee.
67. AUM Kaivalyāye Namaha:  
Everlasting joy of attainment—Praise be  
to Thee.
68. AUM Sahatatmakāye Namaha:  
Thou who Art all-pervading—All Hail.
69. AUM Visvayōnayé Namaha:  
Source of all Existence—All Hail.
70. AUM Améyātmané Namaha:  
Oh, Supreme Splendour, All Hail.
71. AUM Tejōnithayé Namaha:  
Illumination divine—All Hail.
72. AUM Anāmayāye Namaha:  
Saviour of all ills—All Hail.
73. AUM Paramēshtiné Namaha:  
Thou art Immaculate Lord, Praise be to  
Thee.
74. AUM Guravé Namaha:  
Oh, Matchless Guru, Praise be to Thee.

75. AUM Para Brahmané Namaha:  
Thou Transcendant One, Praise be to Thee.
76. AUM Veda Karpaye Namaha:  
The Quintessence of the Vedas art Thou,  
Praise be to Thee.
77. AUM Virātsuthāye Namaha:  
Immanent Art Thou in the Universe, Praise  
be to Thee.
78. AUM Pulinthakanyā Parthré Namaha:  
Praise be to the Lord of Valli, the Vedha  
belle.
79. AUM Mahāsārasvataprathāye Namaha:  
Praise be to the source of Gnosis.
80. AUM Āsrithā Kiladātre Namaha:  
Praise be to Him who showers grace on  
those who seek his solace.
81. AUM Sōraknāye Namaha:  
Praise be to Him who annihilates those who  
steal.
82. AUM Roganāsanāye Namaha:  
Praise be to the divine Healer.
83. AUM Ananta Mūrthayé Namaha:  
Praise be Thine whose forms are endless.
84. AUM Ānandāye Namaha:  
Praise be Thine, Oh Thou infinite Bliss.
85. AUM Sigandikṛutha gēdanāye Namaha:  
Praise be Thine, Thou Lord of peacock  
banner.
86. AUM Dambāye Namaha:  
Praise be Thine, Oh lover of gay exube-  
rance.

87. AUM Parama Dambāye Namaha:  
Praise be Thine, Thou symbol of superb  
liveliness.
88. AUM Mahā Dambāye Namaha:  
Praise be Thine, Oh Lord of lofty magni-  
ficence.
89. AUM Vršhā Kapayé Namaha:  
Thou who art the culmination of righteous-  
ness—All Hail (Dharma).
90. AUM Kāranōpātha Dehāye Namaha:  
Thou who deigned embodiment for a  
cause—All Hail.
91. AUM Kāranāthīta Vikrahāye Namaha:  
Form transcending causal experience,  
All Hail.
92. AUM Aneeswarāya Namaha:  
Oh Eternal peerless plentitude, All Hail.
93. AUM Amrthāye Namaha:  
Oh everlasting nectar—All Hail.
94. AUM Prānāye Namaha:  
Thou life of life, Praise unto Thee.
95. AUM Prānātharāya Namaha:  
Thou support of all beings—Praise unto  
Thee.
96. AUM Paravarāye Namaha:  
Oh Supreme (Sovereign) Goodness, Praise  
unto Thee.
97. AUM Vṛthakandāre Namaha:  
Praise unto Thee who subjugates all  
hostile forces.



98. AUM Viraknāye Namaha:  
Thou vanquisher of heroic opponents,  
Praise unto Thee.
99. AUM Raktashyāmagalāye Namaha:  
Thou art Love, and of crimson beauty—  
Praise unto Thee.
100. AUM Loka Guravé Namaha:  
Oh universal Teacher, All Praise to Thee.
101. AUM Supingalāye Namaha:  
Distilled Sweetness, All Praise to Thee.
102. AUM Mahadhé Namaha:  
Oh Consummation of glory, All Praise to  
Thee.
103. AUM Subrahmanyāye Namaha:  
We praise Thee, Oh effulgent Radiance.
104. AUM Guhapriyāye Namaha:  
We praise Thee, Indweller in the core of  
our hearts.
105. AUM Brahmanyāye Namaha:  
We praise Thee, luminous wisdom serene.
106. AUM Brahmanapriyāye Namaha:  
We praise Thee, beloved of Seers.
107. AUM Sarvēswarāye Namaha:  
We praise Thee, Sovereign Lord Almighty.
108. AUM Akshaye Balaprathāye Namaha:  
We praise Thee, Oh bestower of bene-  
ficence ineffable.
- AUM *Saravanabava* AUM.

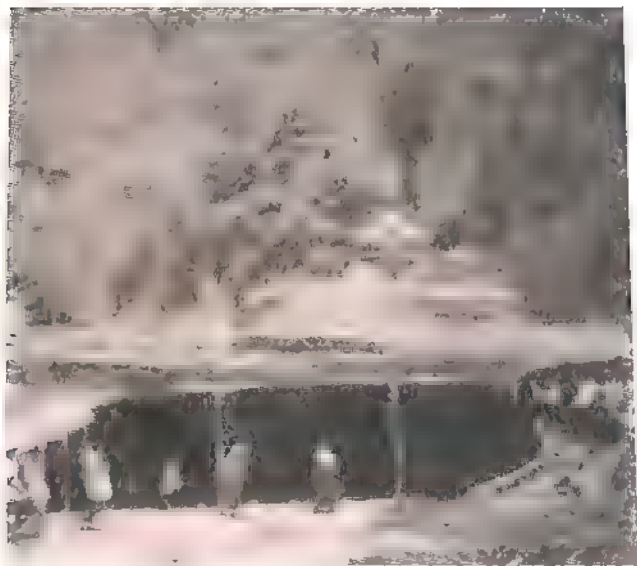




1. Sri Subrahmanya, (Arumukha) Tiruchchendur.



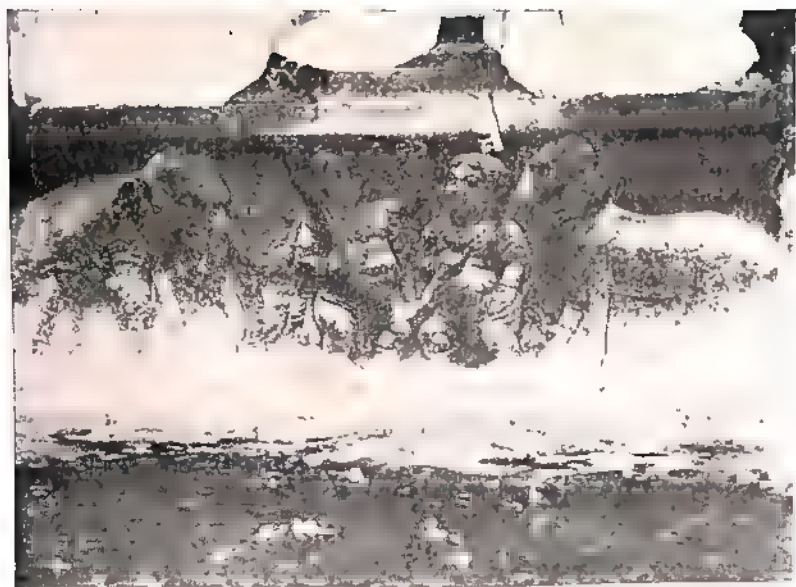
2. *Sri Subramanya and Devosena, Tirupparankunrum.*



3. *A Scene from Pazhamuthircholai.*



4. Sri Subrahmanya with Valli and Devasena,  
*Tirupparankunram.*



5, *Sri Subrahmanya with Aja and Gaja, Tirupparankunram.*





6. *Sri Subrahmanya, Tiruchchendur.*



7. Subrahmanya killing Surapadman, Tiruchchendur.



8. Subrahmanya killing Sūrapadman, Punjai.



9. *Bala-Subrahmanya, Shore temple, Mahabalipuram.*



10. *Bala-Subrahmanya, Siva temple, Alampur.*



*11. Subrahmanya on elephant, Laddigam.*



*12. Sri Subrahmanya with two hands (Emblem of Seval, Gana holding Parasol, Virabahu with folded arms, Aja and Mayura on the side) Tirumalai, (Ramnad Dt.).*





*13. Sri Subrahmanya on the peacock, Siva Cave, Badami.*



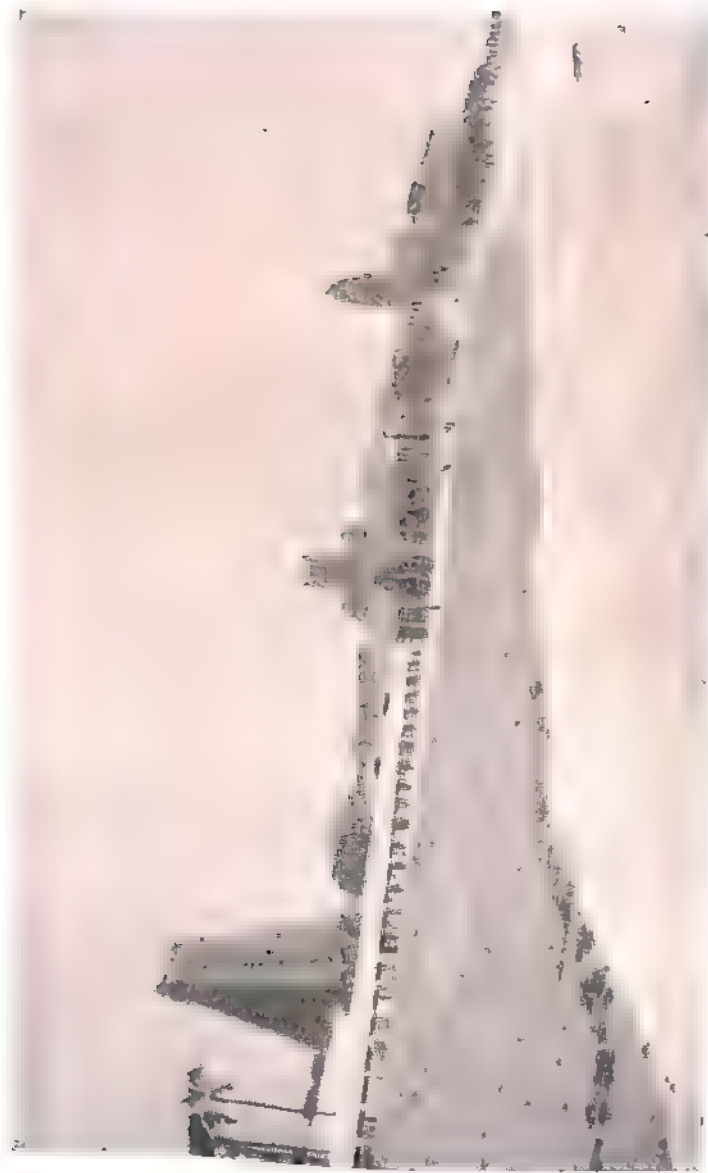
14. Subrahmanya and Devasenu, Anaimalai.



*15. Subrahmanya on elephant, Tiruvalam.*



16. *Samhara-Subrahmanya, Pulani.*



17. Tiruchchundur temple.



18. Tirupparankunram temple.

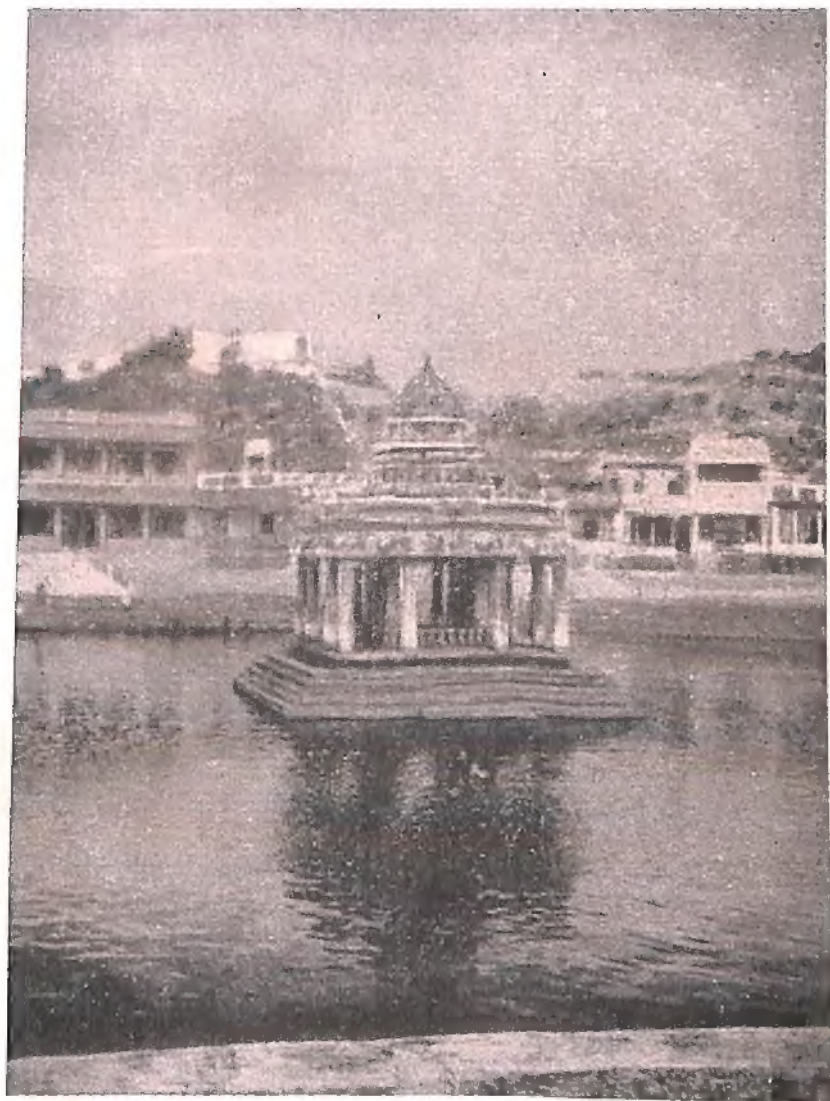




*19. Swamimalai temple.*



20. *Temple at Palani hills.*



21. Sacred Tank of Tiruttani temple.

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Sanskrit Vishva Parishad, Bharatiya Stree Seva Sangh, Bombay Astrological Society, Bombay Agri-Horticultural Society and V. S. Mehta College of Science, Bharwari (near Allahabad).



### THE AUTHOR

Ratna Navaratnam, born in a pious Hindu family known for its culture, has had a brilliant academic record at the Presidency College, Madras, Annamalai University and the Institute of Education, London. For over ten years she was the head of the Ramathan College, Ceylon. She then joined Government service and served as Education Officer, Jaffna District.

Ratna Navaratnam was a delegate to the Geneva Conference for International Understanding in 1951. She is a Life Member of the Royal Asiatic Society, and an active member in many educational and cultural organisations. She has travelled widely in India, the United Kingdom and West Europe.

She has written several books for children. Her published works include *Tiruvachakam*, *The Hindu Testament of Love* (also published by the Bhavan) and *Saint Yoga Swami and the Testament of Truth* published very recently.

The testament of wisdom as enshrined in the cult of Muruga is unfolded in this book. From the effulgent Eye of Lord Siva was begotten Kumara-Muruga, the eternal child of Light, the incarnate wisdom of the ages. Karttikeya is the embodiment of everlasting fragrance of life, the symphony of Beauty, Truth and Love.

This book penetrates the veils of Time and Eternity, the Vedas, Agamas, Puranas, the Epics and the classical poetry of the Academy of Letters (Sangam Epochs) of the Tamil Nadu. It delves into the traditional modes of belief and worship of Karttikeya, in a humble effort to reveal the grandeur that illumines the cult of Muruga, down the ages to the ever present Now—in *principio*.